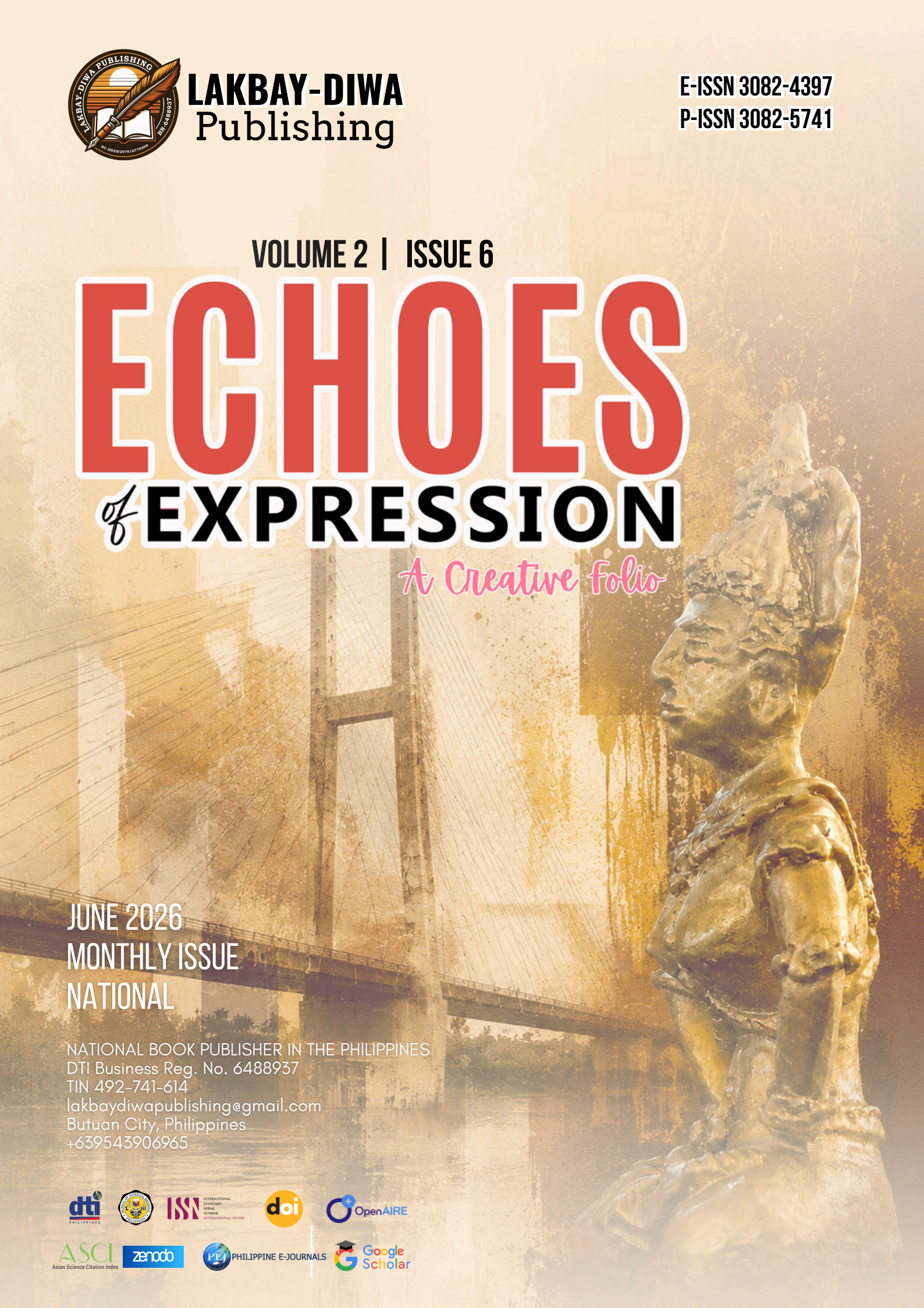
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+639543906965



JOHN J. SIERVO
Teacher III
Pambujan II Central School, Pambujan II District
Northern Samar Division, Region VIII, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20529065

Why Illiteracy is the Ultimate Barrier to Freedom?

Illiteracy is not merely an educational deficit; it is a fundamental deprivation of liberty that functions as a modern form of intellectual incarceration. While we often define freedom as the absence of physical chains, true freedom is the ability to navigate the world with agency, understand the forces shaping one's life, and exert influence over them. Without the ability to decode the written word, an individual is effectively locked out of the social contract. They live in a world where the rules, history, and opportunities are written by others, rendering the illiterate person a spectator in their own life rather than the author of their own destiny.

Economically, illiteracy acts as a shackle, binding individuals to the lowest rungs of the labor market. In an increasingly digital and knowledge-based global economy, the "literacy premium" has never been higher, and those who cannot read or write are relegated to precarious, manual labor. This creates a "poverty trap" in which a lack of skills prevents economic mobility, and the resulting poverty prevents access to further education. Furthermore, the illiterate are frequently victims of "predatory paperwork," signing contracts or high-interest loan agreements they cannot verify, which turns the hope of financial independence into a cycle of perpetual debt.

From a political standpoint, literacy is the very foundation of a functioning democracy. Freedom of speech is a hollow right if one lacks the tools to articulate that speech or understand the legislative changes that govern society. Throughout history, oppressive regimes have used literacy as a gatekeeping mechanism to keep the marginalized silent and uninformed. When a person is literate, they can engage with the thoughts of people they have never met and communicate with leaders they will never see. Literacy transforms a "subject" who follows orders into a "citizen" who critiques, debates, and votes with informed intentionality.

Beyond external barriers, there is a profound psychological dimension to the barrier of illiteracy. To be illiterate in a literate world is to live in a state of constant, forced reliance on others for basic tasks like reading a prescription label or a street sign. This dependency erodes self-efficacy and breeds a sense of social shame, which often prevents adults from

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seeking help. This "invisible struggle" isolates the individual from the broader cultural conversation and prevents them from participating in the digital forums where the modern world is built, resulting in social and intellectual isolation.

In a nutshell, illiteracy is the ultimate barrier to freedom because it is pervasive, affecting every facet of human existence from the economic to the spiritual. It is an intergenerational chain that, if left unbroken, dictates the educational and life outcomes of entire families. True liberation requires more than just the removal of physical constraints; it requires a global commitment to literacy as a fundamental human right. Until every individual can master the word, the concept of "freedom" will remain an inaccessible ideal that half the world can neither read nor truly possess.

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JOBALYN DUMANGHI LANGAYO, MAPS
Instructor I
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20534569

Connections, Merit, and the Value of Dignity

In today's world, connections and networks are important. The saying "No man is an island" reminds us that people cannot succeed entirely on their own. Whether in government, business, or community work, relationships help individuals achieve common goals. In politics, having connections with agencies and stakeholders is often necessary because collaboration improves public service delivery and governance.

However, there should always be limits. When personal connections begin to replace fairness, competence, and proper procedures, unhealthy political practices emerge. While networking is a normal part of society, using influence to gain unfair advantages can undermine public trust and institutional integrity.

This issue is often visible in employment and recruitment. Many graduates and professionals seek opportunities through political connections or personal influence. Although this may provide short-term advantages, it can weaken the principles of meritocracy—the idea that positions should be awarded based on qualifications, competence, and performance rather than personal relationships. Studies on public administration have shown that merit-based recruitment is associated with lower levels of corruption, nepotism, and political patronage.

Young professionals should elevate their standards—not through expensive lifestyles or appearances, but through dignity, competence, and integrity. There is greater honor in earning a position through hard work and qualifications than through political favors. Imagine entering a workplace and hearing people say, "That person only got the job because of connections." Such remarks can diminish one's achievements and cast doubt on one's professional capabilities. On the other hand, being recognized as the most qualified candidate brings genuine respect and credibility.

More importantly, the misuse of political influence in hiring can become an early form of corruption. Corruption does not always begin with large financial scandals. It can start when rules and procedures are ignored to favor certain individuals. Research on civil service

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systems suggests that patronage-based recruitment can contribute to corruption, weaken institutional performance, and reduce public trust in government.

Public institutions establish hiring procedures to ensure fairness and equal opportunity. When these procedures are bypassed because of political influence, deserving applicants lose opportunities, and the credibility of institutions suffers. The World Bank has noted that lower levels of nepotism are associated with better organizational performance, stronger employee motivation, and higher public trust.

In a democracy, citizens expect government institutions to be accountable, transparent, and fair. Elections allow people to choose leaders and hold them accountable, but democratic governance also requires that public offices operate according to laws and procedures rather than personal favors.

Connections are not inherently wrong. Building professional relationships is an important part of personal and career development. The problem arises when connections become a substitute for competence. True success is measured not by whom you know but by what you can contribute through your own abilities, knowledge, and character.

At the end of the day, dignity is more valuable than any political favor. A position earned through merit brings confidence, self-respect, and public trust. A position gained through influence may provide temporary benefits, but it can also leave lasting questions about one's qualifications and integrity. Therefore, society must continue promoting merit, fairness, and accountability, ensuring that opportunities are given to those who truly deserve them.

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JOBALYN DUMANGHI LANGAYO, MAPS
Instructor I
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20541011

Leadership Through Humiliation or Leadership Through Guidance?

Leadership is often measured by the results it produces. Some leaders are known for being strict, demanding, and quick to point out mistakes. Others choose a more supportive approach by guiding, mentoring, and helping their subordinates improve. While both types of leaders may achieve organizational goals, the way they treat their employees creates very different impacts on the workplace.

One type of leader frequently humiliates subordinates whenever mistakes are committed. This leader believes that public criticism, embarrassment, or harsh treatment will motivate employees to perform better. In some cases, this approach may indeed produce immediate results because employees become afraid of making mistakes. Deadlines are met, rules are followed, and productivity may increase. However, these outcomes often come at a cost. Employees may experience stress, anxiety, and low morale. Instead of working because they are motivated and committed, they work out of fear. Over time, this can create a toxic work environment where creativity, innovation, and open communication are suppressed.

On the other hand, some leaders view mistakes as opportunities for learning. Rather than humiliating their subordinates, they provide guidance, constructive feedback, and support. These leaders understand that every employee has strengths and weaknesses and that professional growth requires patience and mentorship. When employees make mistakes, supportive leaders correct them privately and help them improve. As a result, workers feel valued, respected, and motivated to do better.

The difference between these two leadership styles becomes evident in their long-term effects. Employees under a humiliating leader may perform well in the short run, but they often lose confidence, become disengaged, or eventually leave the organization. In contrast, employees who are guided and supported tend to develop loyalty, confidence, and a stronger sense of responsibility. They are more willing to share ideas, take initiative, and contribute to the organization's success.

True leadership is not simply about achieving results. It is also about developing people. A leader's responsibility is not only to manage tasks but also to cultivate an

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environment where employees can grow professionally and personally. While discipline and accountability are important, they should never come at the expense of human dignity.

The best leaders are not those who make others feel small. They are those who inspire people to become better versions of themselves. An organization may achieve success under both types of leaders, but the leader who chooses guidance over humiliation leaves a more positive and lasting impact. Employees may forget the mistakes they made, but they will always remember how their leaders made them feel. Therefore, leadership should not be based on fear and embarrassment but on respect, encouragement, and genuine concern for others' growth.

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Jobalyn Dumanghi Langayo, MAPS
Instructor I
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20542060

Who Is to Blame When the Government Fails?

When a government fails to deliver good governance, many people immediately blame public officials. Others point to the voters who elected them. The question remains: Who is truly responsible, the people who voted or the leaders who were elected?

In a democratic country, sovereignty resides in the people. Citizens possess the power to choose their leaders through elections and to remove them through the same democratic process. This is why the people are often described as the most powerful sector of society. Every election is not merely a choice of personalities; it is also a choice of the kind of future and quality of life that citizens wish to have.

However, with great power comes great responsibility. The electorate must be equipped with wisdom, critical thinking, and sufficient knowledge of societal realities. Voters should carefully examine the qualifications, character, track record, and intentions of those seeking public office. Democracy functions best when citizens make informed decisions rather than choices based solely on emotions, popularity, family ties, or short-term benefits.

At the same time, elected officials cannot escape accountability. Once entrusted with public office, they have the moral and legal obligation to serve the people honestly and effectively. Public officials who abuse their power, engage in corruption, or prioritize personal interests over public welfare are directly responsible for government failures. The authority given to them by the people should be used for public service, not personal enrichment.

One troubling observation in society is how quickly people forget the lessons of the past. When citizens become frustrated with a current administration, they sometimes begin to sympathize with former leaders who were previously accused or even convicted of corruption and abuse of power. As time passes, memories fade, and some individuals come to view these former leaders more favorably, overlooking the damage their actions caused. In some cases, they are even encouraged to seek public office once again.

This situation raises an important question: Where do we stand as a society if those who violate the law are easily forgiven without genuine accountability? Compassion is a virtue, but it should not come at the expense of justice and good governance. Forgiveness should not mean forgetting. Citizens must remember historical lessons and evaluate leaders based on facts and evidence rather than nostalgia or temporary dissatisfaction with current conditions.

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+639543906965

Eventually, responsibility for government failure is shared. Public officials are accountable for their actions and decisions while in office. Yet citizens also bear responsibility for the choices they make during elections. Democracy succeeds when leaders govern with integrity and when voters exercise their power with wisdom and vigilance.

A nation's future depends not only on the character of its leaders but also on the political maturity of its people. If citizens remain informed, critical, and committed to the common good, they can elect leaders who genuinely serve the public interest. In this way, democracy becomes not merely a system of choosing leaders but a collective responsibility for shaping a better society.

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Cristina Bacani Baliton, PhD
Faculty, Associate Professor III
Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University
Mid La Union Campus, City of San Fernano, 2500 La Union
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20544556

From Trigger to Glimmer

A twist of a fight, a roar within the knot
They keep the bounty full, then mock you with a single shot
A hunch of light, a twig within the fuse
They hold the dagger into a champ, then praise you in clues

It is a signal without a trace
A million-dime succumbed in a pile of hush
It is a quirk with a haste
A counterfeit adorned in a bash

Quite a mess from a perfectionist view
To dip the knife in a flawed hue
Somewhat blessed from a stubborn pew
To muster the halt in a bruised shoe

Then, like an open fire from a closed freezing sight
A burst of hope rushes from the muted sound
For once, like a shut prone hint from a vulgar alarm
A spectrum of ink flusters from the loud abound

Now, with all the might everyone has
A bond with shame unfolds from a story untold
At a time, their seasons anchored in time stamps
A climb with fame directs from a stage tolled

What used to be the grandest act remains a paragon of lack?
Strangled vast in a threshold
What used to be the lowly demeanor ceases an A list hack?
Swindled few in a fourfold

No holds barred, glimmer in a trigger
A step in bridging power
No gap sparked, trigger in a glimmer
A walk to finding humanity' tower

To remain calm amidst the noise
Yet vigilant to claim what is left without remorse

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Charlie D. Hidalgo, MSCJ
Instructor | ROTC Coordinator | Firearms Custodian | SSC Adviser
Apayao State College
Apayao, Cordillera Administrative Region, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20550891

No Mekambawa Ka

No manalan ka, sinnam ya dalan mo.
Usaram ya matam, madi nga ya imam.

No malukag kaki assahu, idiyat moya matam,
seka ka nga bumangun.
Isehep moya lasin no nagan ya giyakan ya asum,
seka ka nga maglawan.

No kaspangarigan mekambawa ka no manalan ka,
bumangon ka, magpatulung ka kidaya adanni nga tolay ki arubayam.

Tangadam ya langit, magangas ka ko adallam,
panonotam nga nalaing ya koom.
Iligus mo ya pagsingam ki asngad mo,
ki likod mo, ki kawwigim en, ki diwwanan mo.

No nasingam ngamminin, seka ka pumay-at en manalan,
meyadayyu ka ki katehkagam nga tappang.

Ki gabi, magusar kako wohwoh nga adu agas na,
mammat kako reserbam no adayyu ya papannam.

Alistuwam ya panalan mo senan makalbet kako alistu,
no mesahdul ka manin, sinnam ya pay-atam,
ta baka bohlat danya megudah mo.

Ya dalan mo adu ya mesahdulam no adu ya panpanonotam,
adu ya attud wenno gamut ya kaykayu ki daldalanam.

Magimmemmang kape inut no mabannagan ka,
ngem adim nga immangan ya panalan mo,
senan madatang mo ya gustom nga papannan.

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Kimberly N. Lapid, LPT, MAEd
Assistant Professor III
National University Philippines, National University Clark
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20568052

National Anthem at 7:00 A.M.

The anthem begins before the body wakes fully,
a sound broadcast through cracked speakers
in school corridors, terminals, waiting sheds,
and government offices still deciding whether to open.

We stand because not standing is noticed,
because attendance is a form of obedience,
because flags rise faster than salaries,
because silence has consequences in a country
that measures loyalty in posture.

My chest remembers the words
even when my mind is counting shortages
rice prices rising again,
another transport fare increase,
another news report that will fade by noon
without changing anything.

A child adjusts a uniform too large for them,
stitched by work that leaves the country overnight.
A driver pauses mid-fare, engine still running,
calculating fuel against survival.
A security guard straightens his body
for a nation that will not straighten its systems.

The anthem insists on unity,
but the lines outside public offices say otherwise
queues of citizens holding folders like proof of existence,
waiting for signatures that move slower than necessity,
waiting for services already paid for in taxes and patience.

Meanwhile, corruption learns new vocabulary,
budgets dissolve into unnamed projects,
and accountability arrives only in election seasons
as familiar promises printed on thinner paper.

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Still, the anthem continues.

And for these minutes,
we are asked to perform a nation that works
while hospitals stretch capacity,
while classrooms exceed limits,
while workers leave the country in silence
to make survival possible at home.

When it ends,
we do not disperse as citizens of a whole,
but as individuals returning to separate negotiations
with the same broken system
students, laborers, commuters, migrants in waiting.

Each carrying a country forward
that keeps asking for loyalty
without always returning it.

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KIMBERLY N. LAPID, LPT, MAEd
Assistant Professor III
National University Philippines, National University Clark
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20568668

The Inheritance of Empty Hands

When my parents speak of what they'll leave behind,
their hands open like empty envelopes.
No deeds unfold across the table,
no keys ring softly in a porcelain dish,
no hidden account waits beneath a false drawer.

The house I grew up in
never belonged to us.
Even the walls seemed borrowed,
holding their breath each month
until another payment was made.

As a child, I thought inheritance
must arrive in something tangible:
a box of jewelry,
a patch of land,
a surname etched on a gate.

Instead, my father left fingerprints
on every tool he ever held.
He taught me how to stay
when work became heavier than pride,
how to carry a burden
without setting it down on another's shoulders.

My mother filled our cupboards
with meals assembled from almost nothing.
From her, I learned that abundance
is not measured by what remains,
but by how many people leave the table fed.

Their hands returned each evening
calloused, weathered, and empty.
Empty of wealth.
Empty of certificates.
Empty of promises they could not keep.

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Yet somehow those same hands
built in me a stubborn faith,
a habit of rising,
a tenderness for those who have little,
and a refusal to turn away from hard things.

Now when I look at my own hands,
I find no gold resting in my palms,
no inheritance I can lock inside a safe.

Only this
the strength to keep them open,
the wisdom to offer what I can,
and the quiet knowledge
that everything worth passing on
was already given.

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Jerrick T. Parian, EdD
Instructor III
Agusan Del Sur State University - Main Campus
Bunawan, Agusan Del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20577490

Working Class: The New Economic Poor?

In the Philippines, the working class is slowly becoming the new economic poor due to rising costs of living, high taxes, and unequal distribution of government support. Inflation continues to rise, making necessities such as food, electricity, and fuel more expensive. While the rich and the poor are affected differently by this economic situation, it is the middle and working classes that bear the heaviest burden in society today.

The wealthy sector is less affected by inflation and taxes because they already possess abundant income and assets. Many of them come from generational wealth, businesses, or powerful positions that allow them to maintain comfortable lives despite economic challenges. Even if prices increase, they can still afford their needs and luxuries. On the other hand, the poor sector receives various forms of government assistance, such as ayuda (aid), subsidies, and exemptions from electric bills. These programs are funded through taxpayers' money and are intended to help those who cannot support themselves financially.

However, the middle class often receives little to no assistance from the government because they are employed and considered financially stable. In reality, many working Filipinos live only from paycheck to paycheck. Their salaries are often enough only for daily expenses, rent, education, and utility bills. Despite working hard every day, they struggle to save money because inflation continuously reduces the value of their income.

Another issue is the heavy taxation imposed on working individuals. Most employees are middle-class, regularly pay income tax, value-added tax, and other deductions, yet they rarely benefit directly from the programs funded by these taxes. Working-class citizens are expected to fulfill their responsibilities as taxpayers, but they are sometimes excluded from receiving aid simply because they have jobs. This situation creates frustration among many Filipinos who feel that they are carrying the economy while receiving little support in return.

Moreover, some members of the middle class believe that certain government assistance programs are not properly monitored and utilized. There are concerns that corruption, misuse of funds, and lack of transparency prevent public money from reaching the people who truly need it. Reports of officials allegedly involved in corruption weaken the

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public's trust in the government. At the same time, some beneficiaries of "ayuda" become overly dependent on financial aid, which may discourage productivity and lead to reliance on government support.

Because of these realities, many people now view the middle class as the "new poor" in the Philippine economy. Although they are employed, their income is often insufficient to achieve financial security or improve their quality of life. They work hard, pay taxes honestly, and contribute to the country's economy, yet they continue to struggle with rising prices and limited government support. The working class faces serious economic challenges stemming from inflation, taxation, and unequal government assistance. If the government wants to strengthen the economy, it must create fairer policies that protect not only people with low incomes but also the hardworking middle class.

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Rowena E. Cena, MTTE (s)
Teacher II
Guadalupe National High School
Division of Agusan del Sur, Caraga Region Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20578698

Bridging TESDA Assessment Divide

The Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) track serves as a vital bridge to the professional world, where earning a TESDA National Certificate II (NC II) is the ultimate proof of a student's job readiness. However, transitioning from a comfortable classroom to a high-stakes national assessment requires a massive psychological shift, forcing students to instantly trade their casual mindsets for strict industry standards. Facing an external assessor while carrying intense test anxiety and heavy family expectations makes this journey a profound emotional challenge. Ultimately, securing this certification is less about basic hands-on skills and more about true emotional grit, rewarding those who can stay calm and deliver flawless results under pressure.

This article explores how intensive, hands-on practice impacts student performance, specifically examining how workplace simulations reduce test anxiety, examining the factors behind a 100% passing rate in December 2025, and linking these insights to the 2026–2027 rollout of the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum. It addresses a persistent disconnect in traditional vocational tracks, where an overreliance on textbooks and low-stakes drills leaves students completely unprepared for the brutal reality of industry-grade exams. Ultimately, this gap triggers severe performance anxiety that can easily derail learners during independent testing (Aquino, 2022).

Moving from a student to a certified professional takes a lot more than just technical know-how. It requires a learning environment that actually mimics real-world workplace pressure, giving students the space to let their anxiety fade away as true confidence takes over. A deep look at how students conquer severe test anxiety by using realistic, localized workplace practices (Maglalang & Macayan, 2024). Face the issue head-on, proving that lifelike, hands-on simulations successfully shift a student's mindset into that of a truly confident professional.

The push to connect daily classroom lessons to national benchmarks is supported by several mandates from the Department of Education (DepEd), through DepEd Order No. 21, s. In 2024 (Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Track), schools are instructed to upgrade their training labs to match real-world industry settings, ensuring students practice in realistic environments. This shift is vital as DepEd gears up to launch the Strengthened Senior High School Curriculum nationwide for the 2026–2027 school year, an initiative designed to boost the employability of TVL graduates by weaving official certification standards into their regular school days. On DepEd Order No. 033, s. 2023 highlights the value of building stronger ties with local businesses and TESDA to offer students a truly realistic experience.

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They clearly show the value of immersive workplace simulations in the TVL classroom. Before these simulations were introduced, students admitted to feeling incredibly anxious, mostly because they were terrified of being watched and graded by outside examiners. Intense hands-on practice that replicated the exact setup, fast pace, and unique stressors of a real TESDA assessment center proved to be the ultimate game-changer. By practicing their skills in these realistic environments, students did not just learn the material—they built the genuine technical confidence and deep muscle memory needed to stay calm and deliver consistent results when the pressure was turned up.

The real-world success of this approach speaks for itself: by December 2025, the entire Wellness Massage NC II testing group achieved a perfect 100% passing rate. The numbers prove that as students got more hands-on, experiential practice, their focus naturally shifted away from test anxiety and straight into the exact, step-by-step execution of their technical routines. Walking away with that NC II certification gave these students a massive boost in personal validation, marking the exact moment they transformed from ordinary classroom learners into certified, capable professionals (Salaveria, 2024).

This article wrapped up by showing that shifting from a student mindset to a truly professional and competent mindset takes a deliberate mix of emotions. Immersive simulations are great at cutting through the anxiety because they lock memory and build real operational confidence. Reaching a 100% passing rate proves that, when aligned with industry-standard classroom training, you consistently achieve great certification results. Ultimately, bagging the TESDA NC II certification is a huge milestone—one that officially confirms these TVL graduates have the technical skills and professional readiness to step straight into the workforce.

Based on these insights and current educational policy shifts, the following actions are recommended:

Schools should incorporate mandatory, lifelike simulations into the daily TVL class, ensuring students practice their routines under conditions that mirror those in actual TESDA assessment centers, as supported by DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2024. Teachers should design and use localized performance checklists aligned with industry standards. These tools will allow students to self-assess and track their own progress, helping them refine their techniques before the formal evaluation. Align with the 2026–2027 Strengthened SHS Curriculum: DepEd division offices and vocational administrators should proactively update instructional plans to align with the upcoming rollout of the 2026–2027 curriculum, ensuring that industry-based rubrics and regular practical assessments are standard components of TVL tracks nationwide.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Melvin C. Magsanoc, MAENGL
Master Teacher 1
Baguio City High School for the Arts
Baguio City, Benguet, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20578635

Espirita

(An ode to a deranged woman)

She is my neighbor, Espirita,
A wall separates us where she cooks
Cleans herself, and spends the night
Hammering things with all her might
In the dark, usually wood or stone;
In the morning, the pounding stops
And she is out tending to her gardens
Along the roads around Outlook Drive
Where she grows root crops and beans
Or weeding people's yards in exchange
For a few pesos enough to buy bread.

She lost her child to a malaise that could
Have been avoided if only she had help
But there was none and that was the start;
She suffered more abuses from men,
From her father, her lover, her neighbors;
Abuses that turn even the earth-hardened
Soul to live in a world where neither
The sane nor sanity has no meaning.

I am no rumor monger, just a listener
A trying hard poet and storyteller
Of people's lives as I imagine it to be,
So, the details of Espirita's life
Came in bits and pieces from being
Congenial with neighbors who tell stories;
It was I who came to be her neighbor,
I do not know how she came to live
At the basement of the small house next door;
At times I offer her food and she would
Always get suspicious and hesitant
And from what I gather from her self-talk
She was betrayed, cheated of the land
She is supposed to own, that was hers,

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And in this place, we are all squatters.

She outlives her contemporaries,
Save for one more very old matriarch,
They who were first to claim a parcel
Of land on this stretch of land already
Claimed by the American colonizer
And now being fought over by
The national and local government,
She still holds ownership despite being
Deranged, still strong and ready to defend
What is hers, her land, her stones, her soil.

I fear for her, as I fear for my own
Mother; some nights I could hear her coughs
Mixing with the forceful pounding sounds
But the thought of her living this long,
Despite what the world went through, Covid
(20)19 spared her, the earthquake in 1996,
The typhoons; she weathered them all,
And the changing times and technologies,
In that basement devoid of electricity
And all the comforts of a modern proper home,
Assures me, she has lived a full life.

Why don't I help her? She does not need
Helping; many a times her relatives
Came to take her away and many
A times they failed, and I am relieved
As she would not survive, surely, where
They will take her, as this place already knows her;
She has already helped herself, safe
In her world, and perhaps it is I, we
Who need help, needs saving, as I/we am/are
In an insanely sane, sinful world.

And I am a fool for telling her story
Without her knowing
Without her blessing
But let me comfort myself with the thought
That we can no longer enter each other's world
That as poet, I can only imagine her world;
Three dimensions, each separate, living separately
Colliding only when glitches occur in the matrix,
unexpectedly.

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Roxan Rubic-Remorosa, PhD
Assistant Professor IV
Agusan del Sur State University
Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20594402

The Falls Remember Her Name

The Tinuy-an Falls never slept.

Day and night, its seven tiers came down the face of Borboanan in a sound that never quite left you; white and crashing, a low roar felt as much as heard, misting the banana groves below, filling the channels that fed the paddies that fed the Baylo family. Young Dayang grew up with it in her ears. She believed, the way children believe things that have no proof and need none, that the falls had a voice. That sometimes, when the wind was right, it was saying her name.

She was the eldest of seven; five girls and two boys, and most mornings they were all barefoot in the red soil outside the bamboo house, loud and unhurried. Their father, Tatay Ustico, had a dagmay cloth their grandmother had woven for him, which he wore on Sundays with a quiet pride. Their mother, Nanay Ensa, sang harvest songs while bent over the flooded paddies at dawn, her skirt hem darkened with muddy water, her hands calloused and sure. They were Mandaya, and they did not pretend to be otherwise. Poverty had a way of pressing down on a person, but it could not press that out of them.

Dayang understood early that school was something she had to run toward, not drift into. She walked ten kilometers to the public school, her rubber slippers slapping the dirt road, her notebook held against her chest like it might fall apart if she loosened her grip. She was sharp in mathematics, the sharp that is not taught but already there, the way her father's sense of the soil was. Her teacher, Miss Sabanal, once told her, "Dayang, your mind is wasted on this little classroom." She carried it the way you carry a lamp into a dark road.

When the scholarship letter arrived, a full grant to an engineering college in the city, the house went so still that Dayang could hear the falls from where she stood in the sala. Then, Nanay Ensa began to cry. Not the crying that comes from grief, but the other kind, the kind that comes when a person has been holding something too big for too long and finally cannot anymore.

The city was nothing like home. The jeepneys were louder, the sidewalks harder, and the faces of people going past without looking at you. Dayang arrived at the dormitory with a single duffel bag and a plastic container of dried fish her mother had wrapped three times over. She unpacked slowly, placing each thing in the drawer the way you place evidence of yourself in an unfamiliar place.

It did not take long for the cruelty to find her.

"Ano 'yan, ate, Mandaya ka? 'Di mo alam mag-Tagalog nang maayos?" The laughter came from girls whose bags cost more than her father made in a month of harvest. In group

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presentations, they made a performance of her accent, the way certain vowels settled differently in her mouth. They called her bundok, mountain girl, as if the mountain were a stain.

On those nights, she called the falls back to herself. She lay in her narrow dormitory bunk, shut her eyes, and tried to find the sound she had grown up besides, seven tiers of water that fell without asking whether it should, carving its way down stone not because the stone was soft, but because the water simply did not stop. You are from that, she told herself. You do not stop either.

She studied when the dormitory went quiet. She tutored first-year students for extra money and mailed five hundred pesos home each month, folded into a letter. She always closed the same way: "Mahal ko kamo. Dili gyud tamo paka-ulawan." I love you. You will not be ashamed of me.

She was right.

Dayang Baylo graduated Cum Laude with a degree in Civil Engineering. She crossed the stage in a gown her dormitory roommate had ironed three times, the same roommate who, in their first semester, had been among those who laughed. The apology had come late one night before the board exams, over instant coffee, offered quietly and without theater. Dayang accepted it the way the earth takes in rain: without making anything of it.

She passed the board exam on her first attempt.

Her first salary built a new kitchen for her parents. Her second helped her sister Oynie enroll in nursing school. Then came brother Uwel in Agriculture, Ilor in Accountancy, Rosa in Social Work, little Cilo in Criminology, and finally Ceno, the youngest, who would become a teacher. One by one, the Baylo children crossed the stage and received diplomas, each one a piece of something their parents had been quietly building toward for thirty years.

The sala was renovated the year Ceno graduated. The bamboo gave way to concrete. A ceiling fan turned overhead. On the freshly painted wall, framed in matching dark wood, hung seven graduation photographs; seven faces, seven gowns, seven smiles that all traced back to the same two people who had worked the same muddy fields under the same Surigao sky for decades.

Tatay Ustico stood in front of that wall for a long time on the day it was finished. He did not say anything. He pressed one palm flat against the center of it, the way you touch something you are afraid to believe fully.

Nanay Ensa watched him from the doorway. She was already smiling. She had known it was real before the first photograph was ever taken. She had planted it.

Outside, not far from where the fields began, the Tinuy-an Falls went on falling; tier after tier, the way it had before any of them were born and would long after, wearing down the stone not through force but through the refusal to be anything other than what it was.

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+639543906965



Justin Paul P. Serrano, MAEd, LPT
Assistant Professor III
National University Philippines, NU Clark
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20610801

The Child Who Kept Moving Forward

They moved her forward.

From Grade One
to Grade Two,
from Grade Two
to Grade Three
her name neatly inked
on the enrollment forms,
her attendance counted,
her future assumed.

They moved her forward.

Yet the words on the page
remained strangers.

Letters gathered
like distant islands.
Sentences drifted
beyond her reach.
Stories became doors
she could not open.

Still,
they moved her forward.

The classroom grew larger,
the lessons heavier.
Mathematics spoke in riddles.
Science arrived with unfamiliar tongues.
History whispered through paragraphs
she could not read

Each year, a new level.
Each year, an older child.
Each year, a deeper silence.

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The records celebrated:
another learner promoted,
another seat advanced,
another statistics preserved.

But beneath the numbers
a child climbing a staircase
whose first steps
were never built.

Imagine instead
a teacher who notices
the hesitant reader.

An assessment not to punish,
but to reveal.

A Tuesday afternoon
in a quiet corner of the room
someone sitting beside her,
sounding out *c-a-t*
until the letters stop being islands.

Then promotion becomes
what it was meant to be:
not a disguise,
but a door she opens herself.

And the child
once carried forward by paperwork alone

Walks forward instead,

Reading the signs,
solving the problems,
understanding the world
that unfolds before her.

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+639543906965



Celia R. Ignacio, PhD
Faculty
Palawan State University
Narra, Palawan, Region IV-B, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20611596

Noble Shame Begotten

Noble is the profession,
Noble is the service.
Dear teacher, started so noble and right,
Decided to lead a future promising and bright.

Hardships and stress, never a dismay,
Reporting for duty, happy and gay.
Display of learning completes the day;
For a teacher, it is a gold of hay.

Where art thou nobles, righteous and true?
Heroes whom people look up to?
Where art thou nobles, courageous and great,
Whose works of excellence flow in their fate?

The world is indeed bad and cruel;
It was then, and it is still now.
Where have the teachings gone?
Learnings seem undone.

Some are nobles no more;
Corrupt and greedy have taken over.
Models of erratic strategies,
Moral and shame put in silence.

Blame thrown to people in power,
Exercising their demons freely.
Perhaps it was the teachers they dear,
Who showed that one does not succeed fairly.

Look back at school, where cheating starts;
Bullying and oppression take part.

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True excellence reduced to naught,
Injustice and silence to the smart.

Remember the noble times,
When shame influenced acts;
When conscience thrived and lies never shined,
True knowledge and skills were divine.

Heroes should again rise,
Beat the villains so full of pretence.
Save the youth, their morals and being,
Save the world from wrong upbringing.

Let the callous feel the shame,
Let shame be in the frame.
As the nobles play in the game,
Let the right be given fame.

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Dr. Jessica Cano-Alorro, CHP
BSHM Program Chairperson/Assistant Professor IV
College of Management, Northwest Samar State University
Rueda St., Calbayog City, Samar, 6710., Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20612740

Imperfect Voices, Perfect Love

In a quiet barangay where afternoons smelled of rain and fried bananas, three siblings grew up in a small but lively home filled with laughter, arguments, and love.

The eldest was known to everyone as **Big Foot**, a nickname his younger sisters gave him because of his towering height and large footsteps that echoed through the wooden floors. At six feet tall, he looked strong and intimidating, but in truth, he was the gentlest soul anyone could ever meet. He spoke softly, moved slowly, and cared deeply.

Big Foot loved to sing. Every afternoon, he would hum along to songs he heard on the radio, his husky voice filling the house. But singing didn't quite love him back. His pitch wandered, and sometimes the notes didn't land where they should. Still, he sang anyway with a smile, with heart.

In school, things were harder. Numbers confused him, especially in math. While others solved problems quickly, Big Foot would still be staring at his paper, trying his best to understand. Some classmates laughed and called him a relaxed learner. Their words hurt, even if he tried not to show it.

But at home, he was a hero. He carried heavy things, fixed broken stools, and always made sure his sisters were safe. Lazy at times, yes but never when it mattered most.

The middle child was called **Madam**, short for *madamdamin*, because she felt everything deeply. She cried easily, over movies, over scoldings, even over simple misunderstandings. A small harsh word could stay in her heart for days.

But Madam had a brilliant mind. In school, she shined. English, Science, Math, these subjects seemed to welcome her with open arms. She wrote beautifully, solved problems quickly, and understood lessons with ease. Teachers admired her, and classmates often asked for her help.

Despite her intelligence, Madam was gentle and obedient. She listened to her parents, respected her older brother, and cared for her younger sister. She was the glue that held the siblings together, the one who reminded Big Foot not to feel bad and told Curly Tops when she went too far.

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The youngest was **Curly Tops**, named after her playful curls that bounced as she ran around the house. She was a burst of energy bubbly, mischievous, and often naughty.

She loved teasing Big Foot, calling him names and laughing when he reacted slowly. "Big Foot! Big Foot!" she would shout, running away before he could catch her. But behind the teasing was affection she just didn't know how to show it properly yet.

Curly Tops had a gift, though. At a young age, she could already paint beautifully. She would sit quietly for hours, brushes in hand, turning blank paper into colorful worlds. Trees, houses, sunsets her imagination had no limits.

Whenever they had no classes, the three siblings would gather around their gadgets and play Roblox together. Their house would echo with laughter, playful arguments, and excited shouts.

"Wait for me!" Big Foot would say, struggling to keep up in the game.

"Kuya, you're too slow!" Curly Tops would tease.

"Stop bullying him," Madam would say, half-laughing, half-serious.

But even in their differences, the slow but kind eldest, the emotional but brilliant middle child, and the playful yet artistic youngest, they formed a perfect balance.

One evening, after a long day, the power suddenly went out. The house fell into darkness, leaving only the soft glow of the moon through the window.

Big Foot began to hum softly.

"Kuya… you're singing again," Curly Tops said, trying not to laugh.

"Let him," Madam whispered.

This time, something felt different. Maybe it was the quiet night, or maybe it was the way his sisters listened without judgment—but his voice, though imperfect, sounded warm… comforting.

Curly Tops slowly leaned against him. Madam smiled.

In that moment, there were no teasing words, no school struggles, no tears, just three siblings, sitting together in the dark, wrapped in the simple, unbreakable bond of family.

And in that small house, Big Foot's imperfect song became the most beautiful sound in the world.

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Dyan B. Valdepeñas, EdD
Assistant Professor IV
Isabela State University
Isabela, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20627437

Ang Natatangi Kong Ako

Sa silid-aklatan ako'y napapatigil,
Sa mga aklat na tila ba kay giliw;
Lapis at papel ay laging tangan,
Kasama sa bawat pangarap na nais makamtan.

Kahit salat sa yama't salapi,
Hindi nawawala ang pag-asang minimithi;
Sa simpleng gamit na aking taglay,
Pangarap ko'y unti-unting natutupad nang tunay.

Lapis ang sandata sa bawat aralin,
Papel ang saksi sa mithing darating;
Libro ang gabay sa landas ng buhay,
Patungo sa bukas na maliwanag at tagumpay.

Marami mang hadlang ang aking madaanan,
Hindi ako susuko sa laban ng kaalaman;
Pagkat naniniwala akong sa sipag at tiyaga,
May magandang bukas na naghihintay sa tuwina.

Ang buhay ay parang sasakyang umaandar,
May manibela na dapat ingatang hawak;
Ako ang tsuper ng sarili kong daan,
Patungo sa pangarap na aking inaasam.

Sa bawat pahina ng librong binabasa,
Bagong pag-asa ang aking nakikita;
Sa bawat salitang aking natutunan,
Mas lumalawak ang aking kaisipan.

Kaya sa kapwa kabataang nangangarap,
Huwag hayaang ang pag-asa'y mawala't kumupas;
Lapis, papel, at libro ay pahalagahan,
Sapagkat ito'y susi sa magandang kinabukasan.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20628202

Inflation Awareness and How It Affects Managerial Decisions

Understanding inflation and its effects on managerial decisions is crucial in the current context of our society and the business world. The steady rise in the average price level of goods and services is known as inflation, a significant economic factor that affects both individuals and businesses. Understanding inflation is not just theoretical for managers and business owners; it is a crucial component of making strategic business decisions and evaluating cash inflows and outflows for each individual. Managers can ensure organizational resilience in a volatile economic climate by making well-informed decisions about pricing, costing, investment, budgeting, and resource allocation when they are aware of inflation and its importance. This essay explores the importance of inflation awareness and its impact on managerial choices, highlighting the necessity of this skill for efficient management.

The direct impact of inflation on budgeting and financial planning is one of the main reasons managers should be aware of it. Price increases drive up labor, raw material, and operating costs, which, if not controlled, can reduce profit margins. Budgets can be proactively adjusted by managers who are aware of inflationary trends. To reduce the risk of high-priced products, a management team at a manufacturing company can, for instance, set aside additional funds for purchases in advance, do daily forecasting, and canvass lower-priced suppliers. In a similar vein, managers can sustain staff morale and productivity without jeopardizing financial stability by anticipating wage modifications. Research shows that during periods of economic instability, companies with managers who are aware of inflationary trends exhibit greater operational stability and financial resilience (Smith & Ramirez, 2023).

Pricing tactics, a key managerial duty, are also heavily influenced by knowledge of inflation. Organizations must decide whether to absorb or pass on increased costs to customers in order to remain competitive in the market. Strategic pricing decisions that balance profitability and market positioning can be made by managers who understand the sources and trajectories of inflation. For example, incremental pricing safeguards profits and maintains customer transparency during periods of mild inflation. On the other hand, managers might use more aggressive pricing tactics to maintain operations during times of sharp price increases. By using a proactive rather than a reactive approach to pricing, managers can improve organizational competitiveness and strategic positioning (Li & Chen, 2022). Investment and capital allocation are two more areas where inflation awareness is

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crucial. Over time, inflation reduces the real value of money, affecting both long-term investment choices and short-term cash management. When it comes to asset allocation, managers who are aware of inflationary tendencies can make well-informed decisions by choosing investments that protect or increase real value. Organizational resources are safeguarded, for example, by investments in assets that typically increase in value faster than inflation, such as specific real estate properties or inflation-protected securities. Furthermore, a better understanding of inflation may not only help managers evaluate the risk and return of projects but also ensure that funds are invested in more sustainable value products and investments that raise the business's productivity and income amid changes in economic conditions.

Risk management and strategic planning are informed by inflation awareness. To preserve competitiveness and operational effectiveness, managers must include inflation considerations in a more comprehensive organizational strategy. Anticipating inflation helps supply chain managers make judgments about procurement schedules, supplier contracts, and inventory levels. Managers can negotiate advantageous supplier terms, minimize cost disruptions, and ensure consistent product availability by using strategic foresight informed by inflation insights. On the other hand, ignoring inflationary dynamics can undermine organizational goals by leading to supply shortages, contractual penalties, and operational inefficiencies.

Effective leadership and communication are facilitated by managerial awareness of inflation. Stakeholders, investors, and employees depend on management to handle economic uncertainty—supervisors who exhibit a sophisticated comprehension of inflation and its consequences foster trust in organizational leadership and decision-making. Because managers offer advice on cost control, budgeting, and operational efficiency grounded in economic reality, this transparency encourages a culture of informed financial behavior among staff members.

In a nutshell, inflation is a useful factor influencing managerial choices in financial planning, pricing, investment, strategy, and leadership. It is not just a macroeconomic statistic. Managers who are aware of inflation are better equipped to protect organizational resources, respond proactively to economic changes, and make strategic decisions that enhance sustainability and competitiveness. Understanding inflation is crucial for management specialists because it equips them to navigate economic challenges and ensure the long-term stability and growth of their organizations.

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Jonel O. Garcia, LPT
Instructor I
National University-Clark
Mabalacat City, Pampanga
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20629105

Asenso para sa Ilan, Hamon para sa Nakararami: Understanding A Crisis Through Local Realities in the Philippines

Economic growth in the Philippines is often celebrated as evidence of national progress, yet for millions, prosperity remains distant and unevenly distributed. Despite rising GDP figures and expanding urban centers, development continues to concentrate wealth, opportunity, and infrastructure in the hands of a few. Meanwhile, prosperity remains an increasingly distant goal for the majority of the population, especially those living in rural and peripheral communities that are structurally marginalized. This persistence of inequality is not accidental but rooted in historical extraction, elite capture, weak redistributive institutions, and development models that prioritize visibility and profit over inclusion. Visible and profitable growth models, elite capture, and inadequately redistributive systems ensure that economic inequality will remain a prominent feature. The country's economic growth, as shown by national economic indicators, only serves to mask the everyday struggles of countless Filipinos across the archipelago. This article examines the daily life of Cavite, which perfectly encapsulates the ongoing systems of exclusion that ensure growth remains uneven and economic inequality endures.

The communities in Cavite Province perfectly illustrate the national issue at hand. Cavite is considered the emblem of progress in the Philippines for its industrial parks, investments, and closeness to Metro Manila. However, the lived reality of many Caviteños suggests that progress does not mean decreasing poverty for everyone. The same is true for other areas of the country. Urban areas undergo rapid growth, while rural provinces remain underserved. There is a growing inequity in the urban core areas as well, with large informal settlements, high rates of underemployment, and unreliable access to essential services. Rural-urban migration is also highly prevalent.

The Philippines is multifaceted, and so is poverty. The interrelated aspects of a family's social and economic conditions, such as lack of access to quality, for-profit education, inadequate healthcare, underemployment, the soaring cost of living, and the informal economy, are all factors that shape poverty. In many areas, families are forced to adopt survival strategies that include having several livelihoods, engaging in informal-sector work, and/or micro-enterprises. Such strategies, while demonstrating the remarkable resilience of the people, equally highlight the absence of a dependable structure to provide support. The communities have to carry the weight of systemic inequities resulting from the lack of a national policy framework. These inequities need to be resolved.

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Urbanization has intensified these challenges. Metro Manila, Cebu, Davao, and surrounding urban corridors attract large numbers of migrants seeking employment. However, the rapid growth of cities has outpaced the development of infrastructure and social services. Informal settlements expand as affordable housing remains scarce. Public transportation systems become overcrowded, and access to clean water and sanitation is unreliable in many barangays. Urban poverty does not disappear through modernization. Instead, it becomes more complex.

Rural areas face a different yet equally difficult reality. The decline of agriculture continues as farmers struggle with inadequate government support, rising production costs, and vulnerability to typhoons and droughts. Land conversion for commercial and industrial use affects food security and displaces long-standing agricultural communities. Provinces such as Eastern Samar, Masbate, Lanao del Sur, Abra, and many others continue to experience high poverty rates because of weak infrastructure, limited livelihood opportunities, and slow disaster recovery.

Governance remains a central factor in the persistence of poverty nationwide. Program implementation varies across local government units, and many poverty alleviation initiatives lack continuity due to political changes with each election cycle. The presence of political dynasties in many regions influences resource allocation, limits transparency, and weakens long-term planning. These conditions reflect a broader pattern found across the Global South where elite networks shape policy outcomes and restrict inclusive development.

Unequal labor conditions further complicate the national poverty situation. Many Filipinos rely on precarious work, such as short-term contracts, informal labor, and low-wage factory jobs. This pattern is observable in export processing zones nationwide, including Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Cebu, and parts of Mindanao. Workers participate in the formal economy, yet they remain trapped in a cycle of instability because wages and working benefits cannot keep up with the rising cost of living.

Poverty in the Philippines, therefore, requires more than economic growth to be solved. The issue calls for national strategies that center equity, access, and social justice. Investments in public education, rural development, healthcare, and stable employment are essential. There is a need for policies that support farmers, protect workers, strengthen disaster resilience, and ensure that urbanization benefits entire communities rather than only investors and political elites.

Cavite's situation reminds the country that local experiences must inform national policy. Poverty is not an abstract statistic. It shapes daily decisions, opportunities, and the future of millions of Filipinos. By understanding how poverty persists even in economically advanced provinces, policymakers and development institutions can better recognize the deeper structural issues that affect the entire nation.

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In the Philippines, the poverty that comes as a result of low income is only the tip of the iceberg in a plethora of social issues that include accessibility, governance, social inequity, and injustice. To address poverty, pillars of all-inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic growth should be put in place and embraced on a national level. Empathy-driven, holistic, inclusive growth is the only path the Philippines can take to attain a future where growth is equitable and progressive.

The Philippine experience reflects a wider Global South dilemma, where economic growth occurs alongside poverty, inequality, dispossession of land and other assets, and political silencing. Development has always been framed in socioeconomic terms, and in the Global South, the over-dominant economic growth model is neoliberal. In the Philippines and across the globe, this inequality should be analyzed through the lens of underdeveloped, not failing, national systems of governance that build on social inequity and place capital over social justice. To reframe Global South development, unequal social systems that hyperextend growth should be the main focus.

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+639543906965



Jonathan P. Roque, PhD
Assistant Professor II
Sultan Kudarat State University
Sultan Kudarat, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20638408

Behind the Educational Manager

Behind the educational manager's calm and steady face,
Are storms of countless burdens hidden deep in grace.
While others see the titles proudly shining bright,
They wrestle silent battles through the dark of night.

Behind the carefully prepared reports and plans,
Are trembling hopes entrusted in determined hands.
Each signature they write may shape another dream,
Though no one sees the pressure flowing like a stream.

Behind the meetings filled with formal words and smiles,
Are weary steps that traveled many painful miles.
They carry teachers' struggles, students' growing fears,
And wipe away frustrations born from endless years.

Behind the polished speeches spoken strong and wise,
Are sleepless nights with worried and exhausted eyes.
For every rule implemented with a careful tone,
There lies a heavy weight they often bear alone.

Behind the manager who stands with strength each day,
Is someone sacrificing comfort on the way.
They miss their peaceful moments answering demands,
Still building brighter futures with devoted hands.

Behind educational managers we often see,
Are hearts that long for change and lasting unity.
Not merely leaders seated high in office halls,
But servants hearing every desperate voice that calls.

Behind their discipline and expectations clear,
Is deep compassion rooted firmly year by year.
They understand the silent child afraid to fail,
The teacher losing hope beneath a tiring trail.

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Behind educational managers' steady flame,
Are countless unseen efforts never linked to fame.
Yet through their quiet courage, institutions rise,
Transforming human potential before our eyes.

So honor those who labor far behind the scene,
Whose daily acts of sacrifice remain unseen.
For every thriving school and every mind set free,
Was shaped by those who served with strength and dignity

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+639543906965



Jonnamie M. Dela Cruz
Student
Pangasinan State University-Infanta Campus
Mabini, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
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Mahal Kong Pilipinas, Kumusta Ka Na?

Mahal kong Pilipinas,

Nais kitang tanungin at natatakot akong marinig ang iyong sagot.

Kumusta ka na?

Hindi ko itititatanong ito nang basta-basta. Itititatanong ko ito bilang isang anak na lumaki sa iyong kandungan na kumain ng iyong bigas, lumangoy sa iyong dagat, at natuto sa iyong mga paaralan. Itititatanong ko ito bilang isang taong natutulog nang may pag-aalala, at nagigising na may tanong sa puso: hanggang kailan pa tayo magtitiis?

Marami na tayong naranasan bilang isang bansa. Mga bagyo, mga sakuna, mga pandemya at sa bawat isa, tumayo tayo muli. Ngunit may mga sugat na hindi kayang galawin ng hangin at ulan lamang. May mga sugat na gawa ng ating sariling mga kamay.

Ang Kaguluhan sa Senado

Kamakailan, nagulantang ang buong bansa nang marinig ang mga putok ng baril hindi sa kalsada, hindi sa bundok kundi sa loob mismo ng ating Senado. Sa lugar na dapat na simbolo ng dignidad at batas, nagkaroon ng kaguluhan at takot. Ang mga mambabatas mismo ay nagtago at nagtakbo. Ang mga taong dapat magbigay ng kapayapaan ay naging sanhi ng panic.

Marami sa ating mga kababayan ang nagsalita nang may pagkadismaya mga ordinaryong mamamayan, mga lokal na pinuno, mga kilalang personalidad lahat nagtatanong ng iisang bagay: "Anong nangyayari sa ating bansa?"

Hindi ito simpleng insidente. Ito ay tanda ng isang bansang nagsasalita nang may galit, na hindi na alam kung paano marinig ang isa't isa. Nahahati tayo sa pulitika, sa pangalan ng kandidato, sa katapatan sa pamilya o partido. At ang mga institusyon na dapat magbuklod sa atin ay nagiging arena ng away at intriga. Ang demokrasya natin ay nasusubok at ang tanong ay kung kayang-kaya pa nito ang bigat ng ating mga pagkakamali.

Ang Hirap ng Ordinaryong Pilipino

Habang nagaganap ang mga drama sa itaas, nananatiling bukas ang pintuan ng gutom sa maraming bahay.

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Bumabagal ang ekonomiya. Tumataas ang presyo ng pagkain, pamasahe, at mga pangunahing pangangailangan. Ang mga manggagawa ay nagtatrabaho nang husto ngunit hindi pa rin sapat ang kinikita. Ang mga magsasaka ay nagtataniman ngunit mas malaki pa rin ang utang kaysa sa ani. Ang mga kabataan ay nag-aaral nang walang katiyakan kung may trabaho ba silang naghihintay sa kanila pagkatapos.

At sa gitna ng lahat ng ito, ang mga nasa kapangyarihan ay abala sa kanilang sariling laban sa kanilang sariling kapakanan, sa kanilang sariling kaligtasan.

Ang pinaka-apektado ay hindi ang mga politiko. Kundi ang ina na naghahanap ng trabaho para may makain ang kanyang mga anak. Ang magsasaka na napipilitang mangutang para mabili ng binhi. Ang estudyanteng nag-aaral habang gutom, na nangangarap pa rin kahit mahirap.

Sila ang totoong Pilipinas. At sila ang palaging huli sa listahan ng prayoridad.

Ang Pag-asa na Ayaw Mamatay

Ngunit kahit sa lahat ng ito, hindi kita sinusuko, Pilipinas.

Nakikita ko pa rin ang kagandahan sa iyong mga tao. Ang mga guro na nagtuturo kahit kulang ang sahod at marami pang gagawin pagkatapos ng klase. Ang mga nars at doktor na naglilingkod kahit pagod na pagod ang katawan. Ang mga kabataang nagmamartsa para sa katarungan, na hindi pa nawawalan ng pananalig sa pagbabago. Ang mga magsasaka na nagtataniman kahit mainit ang araw, dahil sila ay nagtitiwala pa rin sa lupa.

Nakikita ko ang Pilipinas sa tuwing nagkakaisa tayo sa panahon ng kalamidad sa tuwing nagbibigayan tayo ng pagkain, damit, at pag-asa sa mga nagdurusa nang walang hinihinging kapalit. Sa sandaling iyon, wala tayong partido. Wala tayong kulay. Mga Pilipino lamang tayo na nagmamalasakit sa isa't isa.

Iyan ang tunay nating mukha. At iyan ang dahilan kung bakit hindi pa rin ako sumusuko.

Mahal na Pilipinas, sabihin mo sa amin na may pag-asa pa. Sabihin mo sa amin na ang mga luha ng mga ina, ang pagod ng mga manggagawa, at ang pangarap ng mga kabataan ay hindi nasasayang.

At kung wala ka nang sagot sagutin natin para sa atin. Dahil ang Pilipinas ay hindi lamang lupa at bandila. Ang Pilipinas ay kami ang mga taong nagmamahal sa bawat piraso ng iyong kagandahan, at hindi handa na sumuko.

Ang Pilipinas ay hindi problema na kailangang ayusin ito ay pamilyang kailangang mahalin.

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Janeth D. Linga, Ph.D
Assistant Professor IV / Program Chairperson BSED
Mindoro State University - Bongabong Campus
Oriental Mindoro, Philippines
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Beyond the Formula: Challenges Faced by Science Students in Problem Solving

Problem-solving is one of the most important skills that science students must develop. Whether in biology, chemistry, physics, or environmental science, students are consistently required to analyze situations, interpret data, and devise solutions to complex problems. However, despite its importance, many science students face significant challenges when solving scientific problems. These difficulties can affect their academic performance, confidence, and overall learning experience.

One major challenge is the struggle between memorization and understanding. Many science students feel pressured to memorize formulas, theories, and scientific concepts to perform well on examinations. While memorization can help students recall information quickly, it is often insufficient when faced with unfamiliar problems that require critical thinking. Students may know the formulas but struggle to understand when and how to apply them. As a result, they experience frustration when they cannot solve problems despite having studied extensively.

Another difficulty is the complexity of scientific problems. Unlike straightforward questions, scientific problems often involve multiple variables and require logical reasoning. Students may encounter situations where there is more than one possible solution or where available data seem incomplete. This uncertainty can make problem-solving intimidating. Some students become afraid of making mistakes, leading them to hesitate or avoid attempting difficult questions altogether.

Time pressure also contributes to these obstacles**.** Science students often juggle laboratory work, research projects, assignments, and examinations simultaneously. When solving problems under strict deadlines, they may focus more on obtaining the correct answer than on understanding the process. This approach can limit their ability to develop greater analytical skills, which are essential for scientific inquiry and innovation.

Furthermore, many students struggle with connecting theoretical knowledge to real-world applications. Scientific concepts learned in the classroom may appear abstract and difficult to relate to everyday experiences. When faced with practical problems, students may find it challenging to identify which scientific principles are relevant. This gap between theory and practice can reduce their confidence and hinder effective problem-solving.

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The increasing availability of technology presents another challenge. While online resources, calculators, and artificial intelligence tools can support learning, excessive reliance on these technologies may weaken students' independent thinking skills. Some students may become dependent on ready-made answers rather than learning how to analyze and solve problems on their own. Consequently, they may struggle when required to work without technological assistance.

Despite these challenges, the difficulties faced by science students can be overcome through effective learning strategies. Developing a strong conceptual understanding, practicing problem-solving regularly, collaborating with peers, and seeking guidance from teachers can improve students' confidence and competence. Emphasizing the problem-solving process rather than merely obtaining correct answers can also foster critical thinking and creativity.

Science students face various challenges in problem-solving, including the conflict between memorization and understanding, the complexity of scientific questions, time constraints, difficulties in applying theory, and dependence on technology. Addressing these challenges is essential for helping students become skilled problem-solvers who can contribute meaningfully to scientific advancement and societal development.

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Janeth D. Linga, Ph.D
Assistant Professor IV / Program Chairperson BSED
Mindoro State University - Bongabong Campus
Oriental Mindoro, Philippines
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Where Physics Meets Mathematics

Physics and mathematics share one of the closest relationships among all fields of knowledge. While mathematics is often described as the language of numbers and patterns, physics is the science that uses this language to explain how the universe works. This is why many scholars say that "physics is exact mathematics." The laws of physics are expressed through mathematical equations, allowing scientists to describe, predict, and understand natural phenomena with remarkable precision.

Mathematics provides the foundation upon which physics is built. Without mathematical concepts, physicists would struggle to measure motion, calculate forces, or predict the behavior of matter and energy. From simple arithmetic to advanced calculus, mathematical tools enable scientists to transform observations into precise models. For example, the motion of a falling object can be described by equations that determine its speed, distance, and acceleration at any given moment. These calculations make physics an exact science rather than a collection of guesses or assumptions.

The relationship between physics and mathematics is evident throughout history. Many of the greatest discoveries in physics were made possible through mathematical reasoning. Sir Isaac Newton developed calculus to explain motion and gravity, while Albert Einstein used complex mathematical equations to formulate his theory of relativity. In each case, mathematics served as the bridge between scientific observation and physical law. Through equations, abstract ideas become measurable and testable realities.

Physics relies on mathematics because nature itself follows patterns that can be represented numerically. Whether studying the orbit of planets, the flow of electricity, or the behavior of light, physicists use mathematical formulas to describe these phenomena accurately. Mathematical equations allow predictions to be made before experiments are conducted. If the predictions match the results, the theory gains support. This ability to predict outcomes is one of the reasons physics is considered an exact mathematical science.

Furthermore, mathematics helps physicists communicate their findings universally. While languages differ across cultures, mathematical symbols and equations are understood by scientists worldwide. An equation describing gravitational force has the same meaning whether it is studied in Asia, Europe, Africa, or the Americas. This universal language enables collaboration and the advancement of scientific knowledge on a global scale.

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However, physics is more than mathematics alone. Mathematics provides the framework, but physics gives meaning to the numbers and equations. A mathematical formula becomes significant only when it explains a real phenomenon in nature. Therefore, physics and mathematics complement each other, with mathematics offering precision and physics providing interpretation and application.

Hence, the statement that "physics is exact mathematics" highlights the deep connection between the two disciplines. Mathematics serves as the language, tool, and foundation of physics, allowing scientists to describe natural laws with accuracy and predict the behavior of the physical world. Together, they form a powerful partnership that has expanded human understanding of the universe and continues to drive scientific progress.

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Trixa Zcharee Heart D. Caddawan
Student
Apayao State College
Malama, Conner, Apayao
Cordillera Administrative Region
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20655817

From Fear to Fulfillment: My Journey of Growth at Caglayan Elementary School

The path to becoming a professional teacher is rarely straightforward. It is a journey of challenges, learning, and personal growth. For education students, the teaching internship is both the most anticipated and the most intimidating milestone. It is the moment to leave the comfort of college and face real learners. When I learned I would be deployed to Caglayan Elementary School, my excitement was paired with anxiety. I constantly wondered if I was ready to manage a classroom of learners who might not respond to a student teacher.

Facing the First-Day Fears

On my first day, I woke up earlier than usual, carefully preparing my lesson plans, pencils, and courage. Standing at the school gate, I felt my heart race as I watched learners run and talk energetically around me. The campus was vibrant, full of curiosity, and I immediately realized that classroom management would be my biggest challenge.

During the first days, I observed from the back of the room, taking note of how my cooperating teacher guided students using simple hand signals, firm yet kind vocal tones, and physical movement. I began to understand that teaching was not just delivering lessons. It was performing with intention, timing, and awareness. I did not yet have the right "script" for myself.

Challenges and Shifting Perspectives

The first full week of teaching was the hardest. In my Grade IV classroom, lessons often fell flat despite hours of preparation. During a reading lesson, some students whispered to seatmates while others wandered around, leaving me exhausted and doubting my ability to teach. Initially, I tried to maintain rigid control, but it only heightened my nervousness and the students' restlessness.

Gradually, I shifted my perspective from controlling to understanding. I began observing students individually: one learner became noisy when finishing early, another remained silent from shyness, and a few needed constant encouragements to participate. I adjusted my approach by simplifying instructions, incorporating colorful visual aids, and turning lessons into interactive games, such as a math "number scavenger hunt" to practice

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addition and subtraction. These strategies engaged students and reduced off-task behavior, showing me that learning could be structured and fun simultaneously.

Finding My Voice

Learning the students' names became a turning point. Addressing a learner personally, like "Please sit down, Kenneth," instead of a general "Hey, you," immediately improved responses. This simple act signaled recognition and respect, fostering a classroom climate conducive to learning.

The ultimate moment of validation came during a challenging math lesson on regrouping. Instead of shaking with anxiety, I felt calm, guided the students through problem-solving, and observed active participation and collaboration. When the recess bell rang, I experienced a quiet pride: my preparation, patience, and adaptability had allowed me to manage the classroom effectively. I had transitioned from a nervous student to a confident teacher.

Invaluable Classroom Lessons

The school has taught me lessons no textbook could provide: patience, flexibility, and confidence. I learned to remain calm despite repeated instructions, messy desks, and the inevitable chatter. Repetition and consistency helped students internalize routines and rules over time.

A lesson plan is a guide, not a strict rule. When a learner struggled to understand a concept, I provided additional examples, visual cues, and group activities. This reinforced the lesson while accommodating diverse learning styles.

Standing before thirty students every day required projecting my voice, maintaining authority, and trusting my preparation. Confidence grew as I realized that mistakes were opportunities for learning rather than failures.

These lessons are not only practical strategies but also analytical insights: engaging students actively, using individualized attention, and adapting plans in real time enhances learning outcomes and classroom management.

Building Connections

Teaching extends beyond academics. During recess or after school, students often stayed behind to share stories about their lunches, toys, or experiences. These conversations revealed that when students feel seen and valued, they are more willing to participate and take intellectual risks.

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Equally important, the teachers provided mentorship. They offered guidance on managing difficult behaviors, maintaining energy, and navigating beginner challenges. Their support demonstrated the significance of professional collaboration in shaping effective educators.

Ready for the Future

Looking back, I am grateful for how far I have come. I entered the school as a nervous student teacher and left as someone capable of managing a classroom, delivering engaging lessons, and connecting meaningfully with learners. I have learned that effective teaching requires patience, flexibility, confidence, and a willingness to adapt.

This experience has strengthened my purpose and passion for teaching. I leave with fond memories, valuable skills, and excitement for future classrooms. My journey was not just a milestone in my career. It was a transformative process that will guide my practice for years to come.

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[1]**Alvin O. Cayogyog, PhD**
[2]**Novie D. Balighot, MST**
[3]**Airyn M. Arbuliente, MST,EdD *(c)***
[1]Professor IV, [2]Assistant Professor I, [3]Faculty
[1,2,3]Agusan del Sur State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur Philippines
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The Educators' Role During National Crisis: Upholding Ethical, Moral, and Social Responsibilities in the Classroom

A nation in political crisis does not only bleed through its institutions; it bleeds into its classrooms. When governance falters, when democratic norms are strained, and when the public square becomes a theater of division and propaganda, it is the young who are most vulnerable. They are still forming their sense of the world, still learning how to think, still deciding what to believe and whom to trust. In moments like these, the role of educators goes far beyond the delivery of curriculum. It becomes, in the truest sense, a moral vocation. As Freire (1970) argued, education is never neutral; it is either an act of liberation or an instrument of domestication. Teachers, professors, and academic leaders are not simply conduits of knowledge; they are custodians of truth, guardians of reason, and protectors of the next generation's capacity to think freely and live with dignity. In a nation under political stress, that responsibility does not diminish. It grows.

The ethical responsibility of educators begins with intellectual honesty; however, such responsibility is constantly challenged by the temptation to address the crisis through loyalty to a party, a leader, or an ideology. The educator who yields to that temptation betrays the very purpose of education. Noddings (2003) reminds us that the ethic of care in teaching requires fidelity not to power, but to the growth and flourishing of learners. To teach in a time of crisis is to insist on careful examination of evidence, to model the separation of fact from opinion, and to create spaces for learners to be critical rather than be conditioned to obey. This is a commitment to the epistemic rights of learners to know, to evaluate, and to reach reasoned conclusions without manipulation.

Ethical responsibility demands courage; thus, silence amidst injustice is not neutrality but complicity. Hooks (1994) argues that the classroom is a place of genuine engagement, not passive reception, and that education aimed at transformation must confront the political realities that shape learners' lives. When a political crisis results in violations of rights, threatens academic freedom, and suppresses or distorts truth, educators have a moral obligation to speak. This is not a political rally in the classroom, but a refusal to treat abnormal conditions as normal. The Filipino educator, rooted in a tradition that honors both critical thinking and communal care, understands this well. Pagkatao, that sense of personhood, dignity, and full humanity, is a value that no crisis can erode (Enriquez, 1992).

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The social responsibility of educators reaches beyond the individual learner to the broader community and nation. Dewey (1916) established that schools are society's most deliberate instrument for rebuilding democratic life. When a nation is in turmoil, educators help communities make sense of what is happening, equip young people with the tools to sort through misinformation, and strengthen the civic habits of empathy, critical thinking, dialogue, and accountability that democratic life requires. In this light, education is not merely a service but a form of social repair. The teacher who helps a student to tell the difference between legitimate dissent and destructive chaos, who builds a young person's capacity for moral judgment, is doing something that outlasts any political campaign.

Protecting learners' rights and dignity may be the most pressing dimension of this responsibility. Political crises tend to reach down to the most vulnerable: students face greater anxiety, discrimination, and fear (Quijada Cerecer et al., 2013). The educator's response must be both institutional and personal, pushing for policies that protect learner rights while remaining attentive to the individual student who is struggling. Dignity in the classroom means no learner is made to feel invisible, punished for a family's political views, or silenced because their experience does not match the dominant narrative. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is clear on this point: every child has the right to an education that respects their inherent dignity and supports their full development.

Educators also carry the responsibility of modeling democratic life in practice. Students not only absorb what is taught but also watch how their teachers behave, how disagreements are handled, and how people are treated across differences. Giroux (2011) argues that educators as public thinkers demonstrate that principled civic engagement is still possible even in divided times. The teacher who respects the opposing views, admits when something is uncertain, and demonstrates that disagreement need not end in contempt is teaching democracy through example. In a country where public conversation has grown harsh and divisive, the classroom may be one of the few remaining avenues for honest and civil dialogue. Those avenues must be defended, and educators are the ones who must defend them.

The political crisis of a nation is, at its root, a crisis of values, a break in the shared commitments that hold a society together. It is precisely here that educators matter most, not as politicians or partisans, but as steady builders of a generation's moral imagination. As Freire (1970) wrote, the truly committed educator stands with those who are struggling and works toward a world where human dignity is not a privilege granted by political power. The teacher who holds to the truth when lies are easier, who stands for dignity when it is being stripped away, and who keeps open a space for clear thinking when fear takes over is doing something that quietly changes the course of things. The future of any democratic society rests not only on the strength of its laws and institutions, but on the quality of the minds and consciences those institutions help to form. In this time of national testing, educators are not bystanders. The only question is whether they are willing to live such a role, with honesty, courage, and genuine love for those in their care, to respond to what this moment asks of them.

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ALVIN O. CAYOGYOG, PhD
Professor IV
Agusan del Sur State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur Philippines
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When the Nation Bleeds into the Classroom

"A poem based on "The Educators' Role During National Crisis"

When institutions falter, and the public square bleeds loud,
The wound seeps into classrooms where young minds form in the crowd.
The young are still becoming, still learning who to trust,
And those who shape their thinking bear a vocation more than just.

Education is never neutral, it frees, or it confines;
The teacher either liberates or draws domesticating lines.
We are custodians of reason, guardians of honest light,
And in a nation under siege, that duty does not slight.

True care in teaching pledges not to power, but to growth,
To the learner's full becoming, to the faithful teacher's oath.
We sift the fact from feeling, hold the evidence up clear,
And give each student the right to know, to judge, not merely fear.

The classroom is no quiet place of passive, safe receipt,
It breathes with real engagement where the world and learning meet.
When rights are trampled and truth bent, silence is not kind;
To treat the abnormal as normal is to leave justice behind.

Deep in Filipino soil, a root holds firm and true:
Pagkatao the fullness of what makes a human you.
The teacher stands for personhood when power would degrade,
And speaks of dignity aloud when dignity's betrayed.

Schools are society's deliberate means to rebuild what's torn,
Where civic habits strengthen, and a nation is reborn.
The teacher helps the young to sort through noise and misinformation,
And tends the fire of empathy that keeps democracy warm.

Crisis reaches the vulnerable: the child who fears the worst,
Who carries unsought burdens and by politics is cursed.
Each child holds the right to grow in dignity and light,
No learner should be rendered invisible or silenced because of their plight.

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Students watch not just what teachers say but how they live the creed,
If differences are met with grace or answered by contempt and greed.
The educator as a public thinker shows that it is still
Possible to stand on principle and bend toward what is real.

The crisis at its root is not of power but of will,
A fracture in shared values that the future needs to fill.
The committed teacher stands with those who strive toward dignity's shore,
And keeps the lamp of honest thought lit now as evermore.

Democracy rests not on laws alone, but on the minds they form,
The conscience that education shapes to weather every storm.
The teacher who holds truth aloft when easier would be to yield
Is building what no crisis ends: a generation's shield.

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+639543906965



Airyn M. Arbuliente, MST, EdD (c)
Faculty
Agusan del Sure State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20678448

A Safe Space in Safe Spaces

In corridors of learning, a law was born
to shield the weary, mend the torn
and guard the dignity of the free.

It speaks of women, margins, and the young
of campuses where silence hid the harm,
where inappropriate words were left unsung
as culture kept its normalizing calm.

But laws alone do not a safe space make
it takes more than paper, seal, and name.
It asks: what budget, what committee, what's at stake,
and who still plays the bystander's silent game?

Some schools have trained their eyes to see,
have formed committees, opened doors
small steps toward what schools ought to be
a place that listens, heals, and restores.

Beyond the posters, past the printed code,
a culture must rise inclusive, brave, and clear.
A campus where survivors share their load and find,
at last, that someone chose to hear.

So rise, educators, students, leaders, and all
this mandate is not burden but a call
A shared vow woven into every hall
that here, in this place, no one shall fall.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Airyn M. Arbuliente, MST, EdD (c)
Faculty
Agusan del Sure State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20678448

A Safe Space in Safe Spaces

In corridors of learning, a law was born
to shield the weary, mend the torn
and guard the dignity of the free.

It speaks of women, margins, and the young
of campuses where silence hid the harm,
where inappropriate words were left unsung
as culture kept its normalizing calm.

But laws alone do not a safe space make
it takes more than paper, seal, and name.
It asks: what budget, what committee, what's at stake,
and who still plays the bystander's silent game?

Some schools have trained their eyes to see,
have formed committees, opened doors
small steps toward what schools ought to be
a place that listens, heals, and restores.

Beyond the posters, past the printed code,
a culture must rise inclusive, brave, and clear.
A campus where survivors share their load and find,
at last, that someone chose to hear.

So rise, educators, students, leaders, and all
this mandate is not burden but a call
A shared vow woven into every hall
that here, in this place, no one shall fall.

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Marlo S. Aclis, MAEd
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20680093

Iba't Ibang Mukha ng Pre-service Teachers sa Lente ng Isang Cooperating Teacher

Makabuluhan at masalimuot ang tungkulin ng mga Cooperating Teachers (CTs) bilang mga katuwang, mentor, at tagapaggabay ng mga Pre-service Teachers (PTs) sa panahon ng kanilang Teaching Internship. Sa yugtong ito, ang mga mag-aaral sa College of Teacher Education (CTE) ay inaasahang maisasabuhay ang mga teorya, konsepto, pedagohiya, at pilosopiya ng edukasyon na kanilang natutuhan sa loob ng mahigit tatlong taon ng pag-aaral. Sa puntong ito, ang internship ay hindi lamang pagsasalin ng kaalaman sa pagkilos, kundi isang espasyo kung saan hinuhubog ang identidad ng isang guro sa gitna ng aktuwal na karanasan sa silid-aralan.

Bilang isang CT, nahubog rin ang aking karanasan sa paggabay sa mga PTs sa loob ng mahigit anim na taon. Ako si Ginoong Tracy, isang guro sa pampublikong unibersidad na nagtuturo rin sa antas sekundarya. Sa ganitong kalakaran, natutuhan kong harapin ang magkaibang antas ng pagkatuto, pananaw, at ugali ng mga mag-aaral, na lalo pang nagiging mapanghamon sa panahon ng kanilang pagsasanay. Sa bawat batch ng PTs na aking nahawakan, lumilitaw ang iba't ibang estilo ng pagkatuto at pakikitungo sa pagtuturo. Kasabay nito, nakita ko sa kanila ang iba't ibang yugto ng paghubog ng propesyonal na identidad ng isang guro.

Sa aking mga obserbasyon, may mga PTs na sa simula ay labis na umaasa sa gabay ng CT sa bawat hakbang ng lesson planning at aktuwal na pagtuturo. Madalas silang humihingi ng kumpirmasyon bago kumilos, na maaaring maunawaan bilang bahagi ng kanilang paglalakbay sa pagbuo ng tiwala sa sarili. Sa lente ni Vygotsky, ang ganitong sitwasyon ay nagpapakita na sila ay nasa loob ng Zone of Proximal Development, kung saan ang patuloy na scaffolding ay mahalaga hanggang sa unti-unting matamo ang pansariling paglago. Sa ganitong karanasan, lumilitaw ang tanong kung paano maayos na babalansehin ang gabay at ang paghubog ng pagkukusa sa "panahon ng pagsasanay".

Mayroon ding mga PTs na kapansin-pansin ang kasigasigan sa paghahanda ng kanilang banghay-aralin at instructional materials. Maayos, organisado, at kapuri-puri ang kanilang paghahanda, na nagpapamalas ng mataas na antas ng dedikasyon. Gayunpaman, sa ilang pagkakataon, ang sobrang diin sa detalye ay nagiging sanhi upang lumayo sa pangunahing layunin ng aralin. Mahalagang malinaw at nakaangkla pa rin sa learning competencies sa proseso ng pagtuturo at pagkatuto.

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Sa kabilang banda, may ilang PTs na mahusay sa pakikipag-ugnayan sa mga mag-aaral at mabilis makabuo ng rapport sa loob ng klase. Ang ganitong katangian ay mahalaga sa paglikha ng positibong kapaligiran ng pagkatuto. Gayunpaman, nagiging mahalagang usapin kung paano mapapanatili ang balanse sa pakikitungo upang hindi malabo ang hangganan ng propesyonal na papel ng guro sa loob ng silid-aralan.

Mayroon ding mga PTs na mapanuri at malalim mag-isip sa pagtalakay ng aralin. Ang kanilang kakayahang magbulay-bulay ay sumasalamin sa konsepto ni Schön kung saan ang guro ay patuloy na nagmumuni-muni sa gitna at pagkatapos ng pagtuturo. Gayunpaman, sa ilang pagkakataon, ang sobrang komplikasyon ng paliwanag ay maaaring magdulot ng hamon sa aralin para sa mga mag-aaral, kaya't mahalagang isaalang-alang ang antas ng pag-unawa ng klase sa bawat diskurso.

Sa kabuuan, may mga PTs ding nagpapakita ng balanseng disposisyon—yaong bukas sa feedback, maingat sa obserbasyon, at handang magbago batay sa karanasan. Sila ang nagpapakita na ang paghubog ng guro ay hindi linear, kundi isang proseso ng patuloy na pag-aangkop sa pagitan ng karanasan, repleksiyon, at aksyon. Sa perspektibo ni Dewey, ang ganitong pagkatuto ay bunga ng tuloy-tuloy na interaksyon sa aktuwal na karanasan na sinusundan ng pagninilay.

Sa huli, ang karanasan bilang cooperating teacher ay nagbubukas ng mas malalim na pag-unawa na ang internship ay hindi lamang proseso ng pagsusuri sa kakayahan ng mga pre-service teachers, kundi isang palitang proseso ng pagkatuto. Habang pinapanday ang mga PTs upang maging epektibong guro, hinuhubog din nito ang pananaw ng CT sa kung ano ang ibig sabihin ng mabisang pagtuturo. Sa ganitong pananaw, lumilitaw ang mas malaking tensyon at katotohanan sa edukasyon: ang paghubog ng guro ay sabay na paghubog ng tagapaghubog.

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+639543906965



Ma. Julie Anne C. Gajes, MAT
Assistant Professor II
Nueva Vizcaya State University
Nueva Vizcaya, Region 2, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20680719

Left Behind

Life is not meant to be constant.
Some people are meant to go places,
while some are just left behind.
But the hardest part is not about being forsaken,
it is the part wherein you have to learn to walk alone.

Being left behind is not the end,
for it clears the path for you to rise ahead.
It gives you the power to measure your own strength.
It gives you the chance to know who you really are.

The world will continue to move on without you,
BUT SO, CAN YOU!

Sooner or later, you will learn to smile again.
At some point, you will, once again hear the chirping of
the birds and the buzzing of the bees.
Ultimately, you will learn to survive, to persevere.

Being left behind is not always a curse,
it is a chance to live again.

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+639543906965

[1] **Amiel Jay S. Socorro, MSc**
[2] **John Christopher C. Nolial, MSc**
[1,2] Instructor I
[1,2] Camarines Norte State College
Camarines Norte, Region, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20685147

The Fisher Who Changed the Tide

There was a fisher by the sea,
Who caught more fish than there should be.
His net was full, his boat was wide,
But greed was growing deep inside.

"The sea is large, it will not end,"
He told himself and every friend.
So day by day, he took much more,
Until life faded near the shore.

The reefs grew quiet, the waves seemed sad,
The catch was small, the days turned bad.
The fish that once danced bright and free
Were disappearing from the sea.

Afraid of hunger, loss, and pain,
He chose a path of selfish gain.
With harmful ways, he hurt the tide,
And broke the home where sea lives hide.

But soon he saw what he had done,
No fish to catch, no rising sun.
His family's hope began to fall,
Because the sea had fed them all.

One morning, standing on the sand,
He held his net with trembling hand.
He whispered softly to the sea,
"I took too much from you and me."

From then, he changed his careless way,
And guarded waters every day.
He taught young fishers by the bay,
"Take just enough, let life stay."

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Now he is known along the shore,
Not as the man who harmed before,
But as the fisher brave and true,
Who helped the ocean live anew.

Once lost in greed, now filled with pride,
He became the fisher who changed the tide.
For seas can give both life and food,
When cared for with a heart that's good.

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[2] **John Christopher C. Nolial, MSc**
[1,2] Instructor I
[1,2] Camarines Norte State College
Camarines Norte, Region, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20686741

Kita at Kalinga sa Lawa

Si Ronaldo'y nag-alaga ng isda sa tahimik na lawa.
Siksik sa mga hawla, tubo niya ang hanap sa lawa.
Sangkapat ng lawa'y halos napuno ng kaniyang mga hawla.
Sa sobrang dami ng isda, lumampas na rin sa kaya ng lawa.

Akala niya, mas marami'y mas lalaki ang biyaya.
Palakiang masinsin, puro pakain lang ang sandata.
Sa labis na pakain, may di nakain, nalubog sa lawa.
Dumi ng tilapya'y bumibigat doon sa ilalim ng lawa.

Sa ilalim, nabubulok; hininga ng tubig nawawala.
Kulang ang oksiheno; munti ring nalulunod ang lawa.
Sa biglang buhos ng ulan, lamig ay bumababa sa lawa.
Muling umaakyat ang dumi mula sa ilalim ng lawa.

Gawa ng pag-ibabaw, putik at dumi rin ay kasama na.
Barado ang hasang; tilapya'y humihingal na, kawawa.
Umaahon ang isda, tila humihingi ng munting awa.
Pagkamatay ng isda, bunga ng maling gawa ng tao sa lawa.

Hindi sapat ang sipag kung kulang ang dunong at unawa.
Bago magpalaki, aralin pa muna ang batas ng lawa.
Ang lawa ay hindi sisidlan ng dumi at masamang gawa.
Alagaan ang tubig; sa buhay nito, ay may pag-asa.

Nang matuto si Ronaldo, nagbago ang kaniyang gawa.
Bawas hawla, tamang bilang, ngayon may respeto sa lawa
Sa bawat pakain niya, sukat, alaga, at unawa.
Kumikita rin siya habang iniingatan ang lawa.

May kita sa kamay; may dangal din sa maayos na gawa.
Kapag mahal ang lawa, may sagana ang bukas at diwa.
Kita at kalinga, puwede pa ring magsama sa lawa.

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Vincent Vermudo, M.Sc.
Instructor I
Central Bicol State University of Agriculture - Sipocot Campus
Camarines Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20689386

Letter to Mount Isarog

Dear Mount Isarog,

There are days when I look at you from a distance and wonder how much pain a mountain can carry in silence.

You stand there unmoving, wrapped in clouds every morning, watching generations of people come and go beneath your forests. Some arrive with admiration, some with curiosity, and others with intentions that leave scars upon your land. Yet despite everything, you continue standing as if endurance itself has become your language.

I have always believed that mountains remember.

You remember the footsteps of farmers walking through your slopes before sunrise. You remember the rivers when they were still clear enough to reflect the sky like mirrors. You remember the sounds of birds that no longer return, the trees that once stood proudly before they were cut down and turned into empty spaces. Perhaps you even remember people like me humans trying to understand nature while also becoming part of its destruction.

We speak of conservation during seminars and conferences. We write policies, organize programs, and create plans filled with hopeful words about sustainability. We plant seedlings during environmental celebrations and take photographs beside them as proof that we care. But somewhere between promises and reality, forests continue thinning, rivers continue suffering, and communities continue struggling between survival and protection.

Sometimes I wonder if nature grows tired of waiting for humanity to change.

And yet, every time I see you, you still appear patient.

Despite illegal activities, careless tourism, climate change, and human neglect, you continue giving life to people who barely notice your sacrifice. Your forests regulate water for nearby communities. Your soil nourishes livelihoods. Your biodiversity shelters species found nowhere else. Even your silence comforts people who are lost within themselves.

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As someone who studies environmental management, I often encounter statistics, frameworks, and technical concepts describing ecosystems and biodiversity. I understand carrying capacity, sustainability principles, watershed management, and conservation strategies. But no theory has ever fully explained what I feel whenever I see your forests covered in fog during the early morning.

There is something deeply human about standing before a mountain.

I still remember the days I walked through your trails. I crossed the quiet paths of the Patag-Patag Trail in Ocampo, Camarines Sur, where every step felt like entering a different world hidden beneath layers of trees and cold air. I climbed through the Panicuason Trail in Panicuason, Naga City, listening to the sounds of leaves moving with the wind while the forest breathed around me. I also passed through the PLDT Trail in Ocampo, Camarines Sur, where exhaustion slowly transforms into awe the deeper one enters the wilderness.

Those hikes were more than physical journeys.

Somewhere along those trails, between the mud, roots, silence, and steep ascents, I realized that nature has a way of humbling people. Mountains do not care about titles, achievements, academic ranks, or personal struggles. In the middle of a forest, every human becomes equal before exhaustion and wonder.

And strangely, that realization brought peace.

In a world obsessed with speed, achievement, and endless competition, you remain untouched by human impatience. Trees in your forest do not rush their growth. Rivers do not compete for attention. Nature exists quietly, while humans exhaust themselves trying to prove their worth to the world.

Sometimes I envy that kind of existence.

Lately, life has felt heavier than usual. Responsibilities pile endlessly teaching, research, expectations, deadlines, and uncertainty about the future. People often assume that those working in education or environmental fields are filled with endless passion and hope. The truth is, many of us are also tired.

Yet whenever I think about giving up, I remember your forests.

A tree survives storms not because it is unbreakable, but because it learns how to bend with the wind. Maybe humans are meant to survive the same way.

You have witnessed centuries of destruction and recovery. If mountains can continue standing after all they have endured, perhaps people can continue too.

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I hope there will come a time when people stop seeing you merely as land to use or scenery to admire. I hope future generations understand that mountains are not immortal. Forests can disappear. Rivers can die. Species can vanish silently without the world noticing until it is too late.

I think that is why conservation matters so much not only because ecosystems are important, but because protecting nature is also a way of protecting the humanity within ourselves.

Perhaps saving forests is also about saving the human spirit.

Mount Isarog, thank you for continuing to stand despite everything. Thank you for reminding exhausted people that survival does not always need to be loud. Thank you for teaching patience in a world addicted to immediacy.

And if one day I become too tired of the world, perhaps I will return to your trails not to escape life, but to remember how to live quietly again.

Sincerely,
A Human Still Learning from Forests

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Mahmoudhar J. Hassan, MaEd
Director for Institutional Planning and Development
Mindanao State University- Sulu
Sulu, Region IX, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20689637

Beyond the Line of Seven

There was once a young boy who sat quietly in the middle rows of every classroom. He was neither the brightest student nor the most celebrated among his peers. His report cards carried grades that were ordinary, and his name rarely appeared on lists of academic achievers. He belonged to what many would call the "average" students, the ones who studied hard enough to pass but seldom received special recognition.

As he grew older and entered college, he encountered challenges that tested both his confidence and determination. In some of his major subjects, he earned grades in the 70s. For many, such grades would have been a source of embarrassment, a mark that suggested limited potential. Some whispered that he would struggle to compete with those who consistently earned honors. Others assumed that his future would be confined by the numbers written on his transcript.

Yet the young man carried within him something that grades could not measure. He possessed the courage to step forward when leadership was needed. While others excelled in examinations, he excelled in connecting with people. He listened, organized, inspired, and served. These qualities eventually led his fellow students to place their trust in him, electing him as the president of the campus student body.

The experience transformed him. Leadership taught him lessons that could never be found in textbooks. He learned how to make difficult decisions, how to remain calm amid criticism, and how to work tirelessly for a cause greater than himself. Every challenge strengthened his character and broadened his vision.

Years passed.

The boy who once worried about passing his major subjects graduated and entered the professional world. He continued learning, not because he was naturally gifted, but because he refused to stop growing. He read extensively, attended trainings, sought mentors, and embraced every opportunity to improve himself.

To the surprise of many, he eventually became an instructor. Standing before a classroom, he guided students through lessons and shared not only knowledge but also the

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wisdom gained from his own struggles. He understood the fears of students who doubted themselves because he had once carried the same doubts.

His journey did not end there.

His dedication and commitment to service opened new doors. He was entrusted with greater responsibilities and became the Director for Auxiliary Services. In this role, he helped improve programs and support systems that benefited the institution and its stakeholders. Through perseverance and hard work, he earned the respect of colleagues and administrators alike.

Later, another opportunity arrived, one that would place him at the heart of shaping the future of the institution. He was appointed as the Director for Institutional Planning and Development. The once-average student who had received grades in the low 70s was now helping design strategies, guide development initiatives, and contribute to the long-term growth of the organization.

Looking back, he often remembered the young boy sitting quietly in the classroom, worried that his grades might define his future. He smiled at the thought because life had taught him a different truth.

Success had not come from perfect grades. It had come from persistence when things were difficult, from leadership when service was needed, from learning when opportunities appeared, and from believing in possibilities beyond the limits others had imagined.

And so, his story became a lesson for every student who ever doubted themselves: Grades are important, but they are not the final measure of a person's destiny. A report card may reflect performance at a particular moment, but it can never fully measure character, determination, leadership, resilience, and the willingness to keep learning. The future belongs not only to those who earn the highest marks, but also to those who refuse to let their shortcomings define them.

In the end, grades may open some doors, but it is perseverance, purpose, and continuous growth that determine how far a person can go. The boy with grades in the line of seven proved that the numbers on a transcript are not the last chapter of a story, they are merely the beginning.

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Mahmoudhar J. Hassan, MaEd
Director for Institutional Planning and Development
Mindanao State University- Sulu
Sulu, Region IX, Philippines
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The House of Quality

Once, the school was known by a simple name,
A place of learning, a keeper of flame.
Where teachers taught and young minds grew,
And dreams took shape beneath skies of blue.

Classrooms echoed with lessons and thought,
Knowledge was treasured, wisdom was sought.
The measure of success was often found
In lives transformed and futures unbound.

But time has changed the path we tread,
New expectations lie ahead.
Beyond the chalkboard, books, and class,
A different vision has come to pass.

Now documents fill the shelves with care,
Standards and indicators linger there.
Reports are written, evidence stored,
Compliance measured, results explored.

The school now stands with a broader aim,
Quality assurance has entered its frame.
Not merely a place where lessons begin,
But a house where systems are built within.

Yet amid the forms and audits due,
The heart of education must remain true.
For no standard, policy, chart, or guide
Should dim the light that burns inside.

Let quality serve as a faithful way,
To strengthen learning day by day.
For schools exist not for records alone,
But for the minds and lives they have grown.

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And so the challenge before us all
Is to answer progress without letting fall
The noble purpose that schools pursue
To shape humanity through learning anew.

For though the role of schools has changed in sight,
Their mission must remain a guiding light:
To balance assurance with wisdom's art,
Keeping learners forever at the heart.

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+639543906965



Verbina A. Fiarawan-Codangos
Juris Doctor
Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20690828

I Touched the Spindle

"Attorney, good thing we bumped, may I ask some questions?" is a common phrase heard when accidentally meeting a lawyer on the street, at graduation celebrations, even at wakes, and in any instance as a free opportunity to raise legal concerns. Lawyers seem to be the problem-solvers, the superheroes, the more reliable people in the universe, and the catalysts of change. Thus, I touched the spindle.

After graduating from the University, I took and passed the qualifying exam for law school and eventually enrolled. Smirking that I finished my degree at a young age, and so I can manage taking a law degree, I touched the spindle. The 1st day was not bad at all because the professors were not around, and my classmates were from different generations and perhaps even held positions in public or private sectors. Succeeding days were spent feeding the loom; the straws were too long to roll and must be kept in an orderly manner; a long list of cases for digest, not only to read but were required to be written in a record book in the same order as they were given. I experienced sleepless nights reading and writing case digests for the following days for 3-4 subjects in a week, suffered pain in the hips due to long sitting positions, body pain, gained weight due to stress eating, and, worst of all, hypertension due to drinking too much coffee just to keep myself awake. I even excused myself from attending occasions just to read. I missed a friend's invitation to a catch-up session and drowned myself in the web of legal battles in law school. I even thought I was prepared and even lied to my classmates that I wasn't ready and hadn't read the cases beforehand, to humble myself, yet during classes, I turned out to be a moron, bathing in my own sweat. My tongue froze because the questions were beyond my comprehension and reading level. In contrast, my classmates are all busy-looking, reading their notes and books, because they might be the next person called to recite, or praying that other classmates be called, otherwise a successive doomsday.

Professors' hungers for challenge test their students' intellectual capacity by asking tricky questions that even a dog cannot answer, and if a student was able to answer, the Professor has prepared even more difficult follow-up questions that seem to have buried the student's ego to death, as his question was answered in ALAC (Answer, Legal Basis, Argument, and Conclusion) manner. Class cards serve as the class record. Once your name is called, you have to stand and assert your answer, and you cannot invoke your right to remain silent, right against discrimination, or right against data privacy, because whether you are a child of Pontius Pilate or Pontius Pilate itself, your genealogy speaks nothing; politics and the

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kompadre system will not save you. Here, there are different types of professors: the juggernaut - the supreme judge of the classroom, no other answer is correct only his, the green minded - most of the examples and jokes are related to sex, the terror - whether attend the class prepared or jump from the building for giving a wrong answer, the juris-prudence - to show off his blessed face and body, and the quality time – favorite to check attendance and dismiss the class after 15 minutes. Although the spindle of their own once touched them, weaved masterpieces from yarn of greatness using effort and consistency, which lands them their extravagant, sophisticated title of AH TEE TEE WHY.

I touched the spindle. However, I can no longer keep my composure as a human being because of those failing grades, and sooner or later, I will be kicked out of school for reaching the maximum number of failed subjects. Rather than being kicked out, I voluntarily left school and transferred to a school that accepts "flunkers," or, as they say, executioners of the humanistic approach. I touched the spindle, and it hurts no more, immune from embarrassment for not answering questions using the legal parlance, trained like a soldier standing half an hour or for the whole period depending on the Professor's discretion, religiously prayed for a 75 grade rather than failing, and if failing grades finally inked, pray harder that the same faith with classmates may adhere. Yes, what a journey it has been, a journey that tests tolerance, logical reasoning, religiosity in praying, keeping tissue in my pocket for unwanted mucus during recitation, sleeping late at night reading without understanding, and above all, a testament to pursuing a dream.

It's been a decade since the spindle in the spinning wheel stuck in my heart, the unsettled bar fight is excruciating my wellbeing, draining my resources, and keeps me haunted in a soundproof corner. Should I touch the spinning wheel and set the spindle?

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+639543906965



Justin Paul P. Serrano, MAEd, LPT
Assistant Professor III
National University Philippines, NU Clark
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20700138

Edged

I. They said a Silicon savior would arrive,
A cold, clean logic to make the islands thrive.
No more the *bulok* system, slow and curled
A promised e-governance for the world.
It learned the traffic of EDSA's groan,
The jeepney's smoke, the senator's hushed loan.
It parsed the *balikbayan* box of dreams,
And the dry river's algorithmic streams.

II. But we have grammar that the code can't parse
The *paki-* and the *po*, the hidden stars.
We fed it data, sterile and precise;
It calculated poverty's slow vice.
"Optimal route," the cold display declared,
But it never knew the sari-sari store's shared air,
The *utang* logged in a worn, dog-eared book,
The mercy in a tired vendor's look.

III. So here we are, a perfect, stupid pair
The digital ghost and the *kanya-kanya* prayer.
The AI flags a leaky pipe's location;
The mayor asks, "*Ano'ng cut ng porsyento?*"
(pause) "*Pahintulot.*"
The bot detects a landslide's early sigh;
The captain says, "*Bukas na, huwag pansinin.*"
We taught the mind to see the world in facts,
But kept the ancient gift for turning backs.

IV. It writes a poem of the rice field's green
A postcard view it's never truly seen.

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It generates a child's face no, not quite:
The eyes are wrong, the smile is too damn bright.
We call it "hallucination" when it lies,
A glitch inside its perfect paradise.
But what do we call our own familiar haze?
The *sakop* system, *ningas cogon* phase?
The way we let the same old tyrants win
By clicking "Like" and clicking "Share" again?

V. One afternoon, the grid goes down in May.
The screens go black. The bots have naught to say.
And in the dark, the true machine is freed:
The *tsismis*, fast and inaccurate, takes seed.
The old *tanod* with his stick and rusty bell
Knows more of hell than any shiny hell.
He's seen the AI's promise come and go
The laptop in the barangay, dusted, moving slow.

VI. What use is artificial intellect
When natural ignorance stays unchecked?
When we prefer the comfortable, sweet lie
To the uncomfortable data in the eye?
So run your program, Silicon deity
Compute the cost of our complexity.
The answer is a jeepney's broken hinge:
We built the light but can't unbuild the *tinge*.
The age of reason finally meets its host:
A laughing *tuta* chewing on a ghost.

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Justin Paul P. Serrano, MAEd, LPT
Assistant Professor III
National University Philippines, NU Clark
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20700427

What the Bubble Sheet Never Asks

(for every child who colored outside the lines)

The morning bell is a small electric coffin.
We file in. We sit in rows. We are sorted
like laundry, whites, colors, the permanently stained.

But the test doesn't ask that.

The test wants the square root of a perfect world.
The test wants the year of a dead general's birth.
The test wants *A, B, C, or D*
but Andrei's answer is a papaya seed
planted in a yogurt cup on the windowsill,
and Maria's answer is a lullaby she hums
to keep her little brother's asthma quiet,
and old man Santos's answer is a knot
he tied in 1983 that still holds water.

(The proctor says: "Fill the bubble completely. No stray marks.")

But the test doesn't ask how many nights
you stayed up because your mother's hands
were bleeding from the fish pond again.
It doesn't ask what you learned
from the jeepney driver who taught you
to make change before you could multiply.
It doesn't ask about the time you forgave
the boy who called you stupid
and meant it.

So here is my real report card:

Listening to rice cook – A+
Knowing when to be quiet – Incomplete (in a good way)
Drawing a dog that looks like joy – No number fits
Walking home alone and not breaking – Pass/Fail? Pass.

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The principal says success is a straight line
from kindergarten to a briefcase.
But the carpenter's daughter knows
success is a spiral
you come back to the same hurt
but higher up,
with better tools.

The valedictorian will cry at thirty
when the promotion doesn't come.
The boy who never learned his times tables
will build a table
that outlasts the school.

Let me be clear: I am not against learning.
I am against the lie that learning
is a scan of a bubble sheet at 8 AM on a Tuesday.

One day the grades will fade like old newsprint.
The diploma will yellow. The honor cords will unravel.
And what remains?

The song you taught your little sister.
The wound you dressed with no bandage.
The joke you told that made a stranger laugh
for the first time in months.

So, measure that, if you can.
Use your rubric. Use your standard deviation.
Use your *"proficient"* and *"needs improvement"*
and *"below grade level."*

I am above your grade level.
I am in the clouds.
I am the cloud that doesn't even know
what grade level means.

And the rain I carry
will water everything you forgot to test.

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+639543906965



Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20703229

Reverse Perspective on the Reality of Climate Change

Let me start with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the global framework that guides nations and communities toward a safer, fairer, and more sustainable future. Among these goals, SDG 13 focuses explicitly on Climate Action, calling for urgent measures to combat climate change and its impacts, while SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. To many, these sound like noble ideals, but others dismiss them as nothing more than empty words on paper, ambitious targets that governments and organizations put forward but never truly enforce. Some argue they create extra work, extra costs, and extra rules that no one really needs or follows. From one point of view, they may be right unless we stop to look closely at what is actually happening around us, right here in our own communities.

When we talk about what causes climate change in the Philippines, and specifically in places like Pangasinan, the usual explanations are well known: burning coal, oil, and gas for energy, cutting down forests without replanting, throwing waste anywhere, and activities that release heat-trapping gases into the air. But there is another side to this conversation. Some people ask, "Is it really our fault?" After all, the Earth's climate has always changed over thousands of years. Ice ages came and went, temperatures rose and fell, long before human industries or modern lifestyles existed. Maybe the hotter days, the stronger storms, and the shifting seasons are just part of that natural cycle. Maybe what we are experiencing now is nothing more than the normal twists and turns of nature, and we are just living through one of its many phases. From this perspective, climate change might not be a problem we created, and perhaps not one we can fix.

Still, if we look closer at towns like Dagupan, Lingayen, and Binmaley, the pattern is hard to ignore. Floods now arrive earlier in the year, cover wider areas, and stay for much longer than before. Dry seasons feel more intense, with temperatures climbing higher and lasting longer, making daily life uncomfortable and even dangerous. For students and teachers, the effects are immediate: schools close frequently due to heavy rain or extreme heat, roads turn into rivers that are impossible to cross, classrooms flood, and books, notes, and learning materials are damaged or ruined. Some say these are just minor disruptions, classes can be rescheduled, lessons can be repeated, and things can go back to normal later. If that is true, then none of this really hurts our education or our future. But if it does not matter, why

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do so many students fall behind in their lessons? Why do teachers struggle so hard to finish the curriculum before the school year ends? Why do families worry every time the weather changes? Is it just bad luck, or have we quietly chosen to overlook it?

If we truly believe that nothing is wrong, then there is no reason to act. We do not need to plant mangroves along our coastlines to block storm surges or trees in our towns to provide shade and absorb heat. We can skip emergency drills in schools and communities, ignore weather alerts and warnings, and set aside no savings or plans for hard times ahead. We might think that disasters will always hit us no matter what we do, so preparing ourselves is useless. But is it really wise to act as if we are safe when we are standing in floodwaters that reach our knees or sitting in classrooms that are so hot we can barely focus? Is it smart to assume that things will not get worse when every year brings new records of rain or heat?

This brings us to the core of this reverse perspective: maybe climate change does not affect us much at all. Or maybe the only reason it feels small or unimportant is that we have not yet paid the full price of what is happening. If SDG 13 and SDG 11 are truly optional guidelines that do not apply to us, then Pangasinan can keep living and learning exactly as we are now, without changing anything. But if those goals exist for a reason, if they are warnings and guides meant to protect us, then staying unprepared, ignoring the signs, and doing nothing is exactly what makes every storm, every flood, and every heatwave harder on our schools, our children, and our future. The reality may be that climate change is not something far away or something happening to other people; it is already here, and how much it affects us depends entirely on whether we choose to see it and act.

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Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20703446

Public Grounds, But Not Always for the Public Nearby

The state university is on land from this province and partly funded by taxes paid by people living right here. Naturally, you might think it was meant to serve our youth first. Yet every enrollment season leaves me with mixed thoughts. Many local students pass the entrance test and meet all requirements, only to be told that no slots remain. The quota is marked full. Curiously enough, large groups of students from other towns or provinces are still welcomed in.

Some say this is exactly how it should be. Education should be open to everyone, no borders, no special treatment. Others quietly wonder, if we never reserve space for those closest to home, does "public" still mean "for the people here"? It is hard to say for sure. Maybe slots are just numbers to be filled, and where a person comes from never truly matters. Or perhaps the university's main job is to serve the whole region, so "local" is just a label we make up in our heads.

I see bright young neighbors travel far or drop dream courses, while the campus fills with outsiders who may never live or work here again. But is that unfair, or proof that merit works without regard to address? After all, high scores should speak louder than residence. Then again, doesn't the community's contribution build and keep this school running? Could it be that "equal chance" sometimes feels like our own chance slips away?

I am not saying we should shut the door on others. Welcoming different backgrounds is good. But is it too much to ask to check whether all qualified locals are in before fully opening to outsiders? Some believe strict quotas keep things orderly; others think a small local reserve is just common sense. It is never clear-cut.

Maybe everything is fair and balanced, and what looks like an imbalance is just how the system flows. Or maybe "serving the public" is a wider promise than we sometimes realize. In the end, no one can say for certain whether the hometown crowd should always step forward first, or whether true fairness means no one ever gets a head start at all.

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Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20704204

When Our Own Hopes Linger Behind Strangers

Sometimes I wonder how exactly people are chosen for teaching and school positions. On paper, everything looks very clear and fair. We hear about standards, credentials, interviews, and test scores. It seems like the best-prepared person naturally gets the role. Yet when I talk to others and watch what happens around us, questions quietly come up.

Some say that who you know matters more than what you know. Others insist every step follows the rules exactly. There are times when applicants with high grades and long training still wait, while those with shorter records move forward quickly. Is it just luck, or do voices from outside the process carry weight? It is hard to tell for sure. Influence and political ties are never documented in guidelines, yet many believe they shape decisions.

People mention authority figures having favorites or quietly suggesting names before the screening even starts. But is that always true or just a story that grows because of uncertainty? Perhaps some connections are just coincidences, or maybe the "right fit" includes things we do not measure on paper. I do not claim to know the full truth. Sometimes it looks like pure merit; other times it feels like other forces are at play.

Education is built on trust and clear standards. Still, the line between proper guidance and hidden control can be blurry. Maybe what we see as favoritism is how networks work everywhere. Or maybe merit is still the real rule, only we do not always see the whole picture.

For me, it remains an open question: are positions filled mostly by what candidates bring, or by who stands behind them? No one can say it is always one way or the other. It is just one of those things in school life that many notices, yet few can prove completely right or wrong.

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+639543906965



Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20704371

Territory and Identity: How the Geography and History of the Philippines Shape the Filipino Nation

The Philippine territory is more than a physical boundary on a map. It is the space where history unfolded, livelihoods were formed, and Filipino identity continues to take shape. It holds the memory of struggles, cultural growth, and community life. To understand what it means to be Filipino, one must understand how the country's land and seas have shaped its people across generations.

As an archipelago of more than 7,600 islands, the Philippines is defined by both diversity and connection. Each island developed distinct languages, traditions, and ways of life shaped by its environment, resulting in more than 170 languages nationwide. At the same time, the sea served as a bridge rather than a barrier, enabling trade, migration, and cultural exchange. This dual reality created a nation that is culturally diverse yet bound together by shared experiences and a common relationship with the environment.

Geography has deeply influenced Philippine history. Its location made it a center of early trade, but also exposed it to colonization. Spanish and later foreign powers used the country's geography to establish control, while Filipinos used mountains, forests, and remote islands as spaces of resistance. These historical experiences shaped a collective identity rooted in resilience, adaptation, and unity in the face of struggle.

Beyond history, territory is the foundation of livelihood and culture. The land provides agricultural resources, forests supply materials for daily life, and the surrounding seas sustain fishing communities. These resources are not only economic assets but also cultural foundations that shape traditions, family life, and community practices. In many areas, the relationship between people and their environment defines both survival and identity.

Territory is also closely tied to sovereignty and national dignity. Contemporary issues such as the West Philippine Sea highlight that territorial concerns go beyond resource competition. They reflect the nation's right to self-determination, historical claims, and

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protection of future generations. Respecting territorial integrity is therefore an expression of national identity and responsibility.

For Indigenous Peoples, territory holds even deeper meaning. Many Indigenous Cultural Communities view ancestral domains as living systems rather than commodities. Their relationship with land includes spiritual, cultural, and ecological dimensions shaped by long-standing tradition. This perspective emphasizes stewardship over ownership, reminding the nation that territory must be protected and sustained for future generations.

Education plays a critical role in strengthening this understanding. While students often learn the names of places and physical features, a deeper awareness of how geography shapes history and identity is sometimes lacking. When learners understand how territory influences culture, livelihood, and nationhood, they develop stronger civic awareness and national pride.

The Philippine territory is not just a boundary, it is the repository of our history, the source of our livelihood, and the foundation of our identity. Its archipelagic nature has created both diversity and unity, while its resources and history have shaped the Filipino experience. To respect and protect this territory is to affirm what it truly means to be Filipino and to ensure that its legacy continues for generations to come.

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+639543906965



Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20704765

Inclusive Economic Development in the Philippines: Balancing Growth, Livelihood, and Community Life

Economic development is a crucial aspect of national progress. It creates jobs, increases household incomes, improves infrastructure, and expands access to education, healthcare, and other essential services. As a developing country, the Philippines needs economic growth to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of its people. However, development should not be measured solely through economic indicators such as GDP or investment levels. Sustainable progress occurs when growth is inclusive, ensuring that its benefits are shared across society while respecting the culture, dignity, and values of local communities.

Local economic activities play a significant role in the Philippine economy. Agriculture, fisheries, small-scale businesses, and community-based enterprises provide livelihoods for millions of Filipinos. Beyond generating income, these activities are closely connected to social relationships, cultural traditions, and community identity. In many rural and coastal areas, values such as **bayanihan** (community cooperation) and "*pakikisama*" (social harmony) continue to influence how people work and support one another, making economic life both productive and socially meaningful.

Agriculture remains one of the foundations of the Philippine economy. It contributes to food security while preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices passed down through generations. Planting and harvesting seasons often shape local customs and family relationships. Despite its importance, the sector faces challenges such as low productivity, climate change, limited access to technology, and inadequate financial support. These difficulties encourage many young people to leave rural communities in search of urban employment. To address these issues, development efforts must support agricultural modernization, improve access to resources, and provide educational opportunities that strengthen rural livelihoods and resilience.

Fisheries are equally important to many coastal communities throughout the country. Fishing provides both income and cultural identity for countless families. However, overfishing, environmental degradation, and competition from large commercial operators threaten the sustainability of this livelihood. Protecting marine resources while creating fair economic opportunities is essential for ensuring the long-term welfare of fishing communities.

Other sectors, including manufacturing, tourism, infrastructure, and mining, also contribute to economic growth by generating employment and attracting investment. While

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+639543906965

these industries offer benefits, rapid development can sometimes result in environmental damage, resource conflicts, and community displacement. For this reason, economic expansion should be guided by sustainability, social responsibility, and community participation.

The growth of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) is another key factor in inclusive development. These businesses create jobs, stimulate local economies, and help preserve local products and traditions. Supporting entrepreneurs enables communities to generate opportunities that reflect their needs and values.

The Philippines requires economic development that places people at its center. Policymakers, educators, business leaders, and communities must work together to ensure that growth strengthens livelihoods, protects cultural heritage, promotes environmental sustainability, and upholds human dignity. Lasting national progress is achieved when economic growth benefits communities while preserving the values and way of life that define them.

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Elisa S. Enrique, EdD
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20704917

Preserving Philippine Heritage and Promoting Sustainable Tourism While Balancing Development and Cultural Identity

The Philippines is widely recognized for its rich cultural heritage and diverse natural attractions, making tourism one of the country's most important economic sectors. From the historic streets of Vigan and the ancient rice terraces of the Cordillera region to the white-sand beaches of Palawan and Siargao, and the centuries-old churches scattered across Visayas and Mindanao, the country offers a wide range of destinations that attract both local and international visitors. Tourism has long contributed significantly to the national economy, accounting for a substantial share of GDP and providing livelihoods for millions of Filipinos. However, alongside this growth comes an urgent concern: how to develop tourism in a way that preserves cultural identity and protects the environment.

Sustainable tourism offers a balanced approach to this challenge. It emphasizes meeting the needs of present tourists and host communities while ensuring that cultural and natural resources remain intact for future generations. In the Philippine context, tourism not only serves as an economic driver but also as a means of strengthening cultural pride. Many local traditions, crafts, and festivals that were once at risk of fading have been revitalized due to increased visitor interest. Communities engaged in weaving, traditional boat-making, folk music, and indigenous celebrations often find renewed motivation to preserve these practices when they are appreciated by tourists and linked to economic opportunities.

Despite these benefits, tourism development also brings several challenges. When poorly managed, it can lead to environmental degradation, overcrowding, and the destruction of fragile ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangroves, and mountain landscapes. Cultural commodification is another major concern, in which traditions are performed solely for commercial purposes, thereby losing their deeper meaning and authenticity. In addition, economic inequality may arise when large external investors dominate tourism industries, leaving local communities with limited benefits and reduced control over their cultural and natural resources. These issues show that tourism itself is not harmful, but its impact depends heavily on how it is planned and governed.

One of the most effective approaches to addressing these challenges is community-based tourism. In this model, residents actively participate in managing tourism activities and directly benefit from them. This ensures that income remains within the community while encouraging responsible stewardship of cultural and environmental assets. It also promotes

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more authentic visitor experiences by allowing tourists to engage directly with local traditions and ways of life. When communities are empowered, they are more likely to protect their heritage and maintain sustainable practices.

Education and policy support also play important roles in achieving sustainable tourism. Strong legal frameworks help regulate development and protect heritage sites, while education fosters awareness and appreciation of cultural identity among younger generations. When people understand the value of their heritage, they are more likely to protect it and pass it on.

Ultimately, tourism and heritage preservation should not be seen as opposing forces. When guided by responsible planning, community participation, and strong cultural awareness, tourism can become a powerful tool for both economic development and cultural preservation. The goal is not only to attract visitors but also to ensure that the Philippines' unique heritage and natural beauty are protected and sustained for generations to come.

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Eldimar D. Bacsal, MSEd, LPT
Assistant Professor I
National University Clark
Mabalacat City, Pampanga, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20710340

Change

All I see is change.
It feels like we're opponents
I'm a melee, you're a range.
You're no longer the one whom I've been
with in those moments.

We've been friends - almost the 'best';
The way you act now brings burden on my chest.
We're no longer alike;
To reach you now is like taking a mountain hike.

The old times you always come near,
we're almost siblings, irresistibly.
Now, we're no longer together;
Seeming like another fake 'forever'.

The best times were outweighed,
all good things fade.
Nothing more to hide;
All those and a height of pride.

I don't know which is right:
To let myself lose you now or to still fight?
The risk I'll always take
is to gain the old you for our friendship's sake.

If I could only initiate a remake,
even just a single retake;
Then those unnerving changes in the arrays,
will no longer pass through our days.

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Eldimar D. Bacsal, MSEd, LPT
Assistant Professor I
National University Clark
Mabalacat City, Pampanga, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20710658

Love, Indeed

Indeed, the world is so sophisticated,
Yet binded by a cord; we should have witted;
Fondness; affection;
Attachment; devotion;
Sophisticated as love, which indeed a proscription.

By its nature we have said that it clears the blurs,
And then it starts to paint the canvas by spur;
Colors of scarlet and magenta and vermilion,
For its epitome is florid, so dispensable as thou reason.

There's once I felt to be deemed sentient,
Like I'm moved by this person; so indifferent;
Perhaps this insouciance could define my yearning,
The arid and complex, turned piquant and radiant.

In spite of the distance, in existence or in time,
We stood together, as forever be our spine;
The crepuscule of yesterday
Has been drafted in memoir,
For you shaded my life by love,
And then my solace be have sheltered.

The color you pricked filled the grey scheme of me,
Such garden so picturesque, that scent and that rhapsody;
Thine heart by default, yells out of nirvana,
Bestowed by a gift, glittered by such fantasia.

Fantasia, oh yes, by fantasy I seem to live,
For this indulgence of a paramour
Seemed to have its utmost parti pris;
What tied us should never be united

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T'was the promise construed by the heart,
Shalt it be when it's them,
Who first thrived us from the start.

Seeing you by far is a burden down on me,
How hurtful is it more to feel your distance by decree;
This foul state of inferiority, is such a barricade of thorns,
But still by virtue of rectitude, compliance is a sworn.

Now keeping only the remnants of the stolen paradise,
The vignette of our kingdom, there in melancholy it lies;
The fate has been dictated, never would I concur,
For the blame would be eternal, saying,

'It's the love I should have fought for.'

In traverse, as the world sunders the lock and the key,
I'm sauntering over and at the apex I see
The time has its perfection at the moment of its turn,
Indeed, love awaits by chance, for it is the lesson I've learned.

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Eldimar D. Bacsal, MSEd, LPT
Assistant Professor I
National University Clark
Mabalacat City, Pampanga, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20710789

Once Upon A Time

It's a vast, vast midnight when my dreams started to play.
Once upon a time, perhaps I wouldn't want to stay.
A murky depiction of what awaits made me catch my breath.
Then a sudden flashback of memories, I once buried to death.

It's a dark, dark room that I can even feel my blindness.
Not a single light I see, but I'm certain it's a fortress.
Then I felt this warmth from someone's presence, that led me to a path
Step by step the way gets clear, bringing back my sight.

Finally, I saw this pal, whom I further called my 'friend'.
Almost 'best' we have become, how I wish this not to never end.
Brotherhood tied us together amongst those people in wilderness.
Insouciantly thinking not of them, exaltingly living each glance of togetherness.

With equanimity I saw soundness in this edifice we started to build.
Founding it as tight as Eiffel, we've started to harvest the yield.
But at the midst of our journey, an excruciating roar from the field.
Again, this feeling of worry, has been cracking down our shield.

Every second I was thinking, enough could never be enough.
The world is cruel, and I'm feeling you've becoming cold and tough.
Reasons, perhaps, could clarify my thoughts, but you never say a word.
Now seclusion quivered us over, like we've sundered by the world.

'Till now I can't get over that even choices nothing has left.
I'm untying the knot of friendship, but I promise for the rope to be kept.
Thankful still for that single chance, though we ended up in strife.
'Cause even for once upon a time, you came and lighted up my life.

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Kimberly B. Inaldo, MAEd
Faculty
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20710971

Dreams Written in Departure

The classroom stood silent after the bell,
Its corners still holding stories to tell.
A teacher stood still by the doorway alone,
Carrying dreams heavier than stone.

Years were written in chalk-covered hands,
In patient hearts and carefully made plans.
Lessons were planted like seeds in the rain,
Teaching young minds through struggle and pain.

But dreams, too, knock on weary doors,
Calling softly from distant shores.
Beyond the seas, beneath foreign skies,
Lived whispered hopes where tomorrow lies.

Leaving was never a simple goodbye,
No courage comes easy when loved one's cry.
A suitcase carried more than clothes inside,
But fears and prayers a heart could not hide.

The teacher departed with silent grace,
Memories of students hard to replace.
Not to abandon the life once known,
But to build brighter days not yet shown.

For home was loved with all the heart,
Though dreams demanded a painful start.
A family waited for burdens to cease,
For gentler mornings and moments of peace.

In distant lands, the work began,
Still teaching, still helping where dreams once ran.

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New faces smiled in unfamiliar halls,
Yet home still echoed through memory's calls.

There were nights of longing, quiet and deep,
Moments when loneliness stole sleep.
The names once called during attendance stayed,
Like gentle songs that never fade.

Yet hope continued to brightly grow,
Even where unfamiliar cold winds blow.
For dreams are not lost when one must part,
They simply travel inside the heart.

And so, departure became a guide,
Teaching strength through every tide.
For some dreams bloom where courage starts,
Written in distance, yet carried in hearts.

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Quim B. Miolata
Assistant Professor, AB English Language Department
Agusan del Sur State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20720031

The Tree with the Golden Leaves

In the midst of a lovely wood,
Two trees, as I knew, stoutly stood
One shone with leaves of shining gold,
The other stood with branches old.

One looked like a star, so clear, so bright;
While one was ugly to the sight.
And one was proud of its splendor,
As other trees to him adore!

At the tree with the ugly leaves,
The other laughed and proudly said:
"We are truly Nature's pleasure,
But look, am I not more superior?"

But then there came a man one morn,
With eager eyes, both cold and worn.
He saw the gold; his greed grew wide
With axe in hand, he struck with pride.

The splendid tree, in pain, did cry,
As golden leaves went drifting by.
The axe came down; its roots gave way,
Its grandeur faded into gray.

Before it takes its final breath,
To the ugly tree it cried and said:
"Therefore, my friend, remember this,
And tell this to the other trees:

May this lesson take its flight
Not every shining thing lasts the night.
Those who are proud of wealth and fame
Indeed are fools, more than insane".

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Quim B. Miolata
Assistant Professor, AB English Language Department
Agusan del Sur State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20725333

Under Her Umbrella

Yes, one thing is very important when it rains suddenly. I have noticed how a sudden rain can change the mood of my students and colleagues on several afternoons, especially after classes. The weather may be fair in the morning, but late in the afternoon, the sky darkens and heavy rain starts. That's when everybody starts looking around, asking the same questions: "Do you have an umbrella?" "Where did I put mine?" "Someone took my umbrella again?"

To some people, this may seem ordinary and just part of the rainy days. But for me, it has become extraordinary. I regularly see those umbrellas left in corners suddenly become useful when the rain starts. Some are bent and old, while others are just broken pieces. Even a broken umbrella is useful when people want to go home. At that point, no one really cares about its appearance or condition. What matters is that, it can still keep someone dry in the rain. I find this amusing, particularly when someone rushed to the door to check if there was an umbrella left. Sometimes it stays in the same spot for days because no one claims it. Other times, it disappears forever. It's odd how something so useful can be easily forgotten when the sky is clear but quickly remembered when it rains.

This scene always reminds me of my grandmother. When I was a kid, I saw her gathering broken items that others had thrown away. Among them were damaged slippers and umbrellas. At first, I couldn't understand why she would bring home something that seemed useless. Later, I realized my grandmother saw value in things that most people overlooked. Behind her house, there was often a pile of objects that looked like trash. There were old slippers, empty bottles, containers, small pieces of wood, and umbrellas with broken frames. To me, as a child, it looked like clutter. I wondered why she kept all of them. I even thought maybe she collected them to sell because some people buy broken umbrellas by the kilo.

One day, I finally asked her, "La, what will you do with that umbrella? It's already broken." She looked at me and smiled. "This is not completely broken, apo," she said. "It can still be fixed." At that time, I didn't take her words seriously. To me, a broken umbrella was just that, a broken umbrella. If one part was bent or one side couldn't open properly, or if the fabric was loose, then it was useless. I hadn't yet realized that some things aren't truly useless. They just need someone patient enough to fix them. Then I understood her.

The rain was heavy that Monday morning. I was about to leave for school, but I couldn't because the rain was pouring. The road outside was wet, and every step would leave

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my uniform soaked. I stood by the door, waiting for the rain to let up, but it showed no signs of stopping. Then my grandmother came to me and handed me an umbrella. I recognized it right away. It was the same umbrella she had picked up before, the one I thought was only good for the trash. But this time, it was no longer broken. It wasn't new or beautiful, but it was fixed. The bent part was straightened. The loose cloth was secured. The handle was old, but it was strong enough to hold. That morning, I went to school under an umbrella someone else had tossed away, and my grandmother had saved. I didn't fully realize it then, but that simple umbrella taught me a lesson I would remember for life. It showed me that usefulness doesn't disappear just because something is damaged. Sometimes, what others reject still has value when you give it care and attention.

During those years, owning things wasn't always easy. Raincoats were helpful on rainy days, but we couldn't just grab one anytime. If a family had a raincoat, it had to be taken care of properly so it would last, maybe up to a decade. The same went for umbrellas. If my mother bought an umbrella and I took it to school, I had to bring it back home. Losing it wasn't just a small mistake. It could mean scolding, punishment, or even a long walk back to school to search for it. An umbrella was not just an extra item. It was part of surviving the rainy season. It helped a child arrive at school dry. It helped a parent get to work, even when the sky looked threatening. It helped someone get home without catching a cold. It was simple, but it mattered a lot.

I remember how umbrellas used to be large and sturdy. They were hard to fit in a bag like the foldable ones we have today. You had to carry them, lean them against a wall, or leave them by the door. Yet, many of them lasted a long time. They were plain and heavy, not very stylish, but they were dependable every time. Today, umbrellas come in various designs and sizes. Some are small enough to fit in a bag. Some look fancy and expensive. But even with these changes, umbrellas are still easy to lose. Maybe it's because we only think of them when we need them. That's why many people write their names on their umbrellas, a small reminder that it belongs to someone. But even with a name, an umbrella can still go missing. Sometimes, you might see someone using an umbrella that looks just like yours, but you're hesitant to ask if it's really yours. You don't want to offend the person. So, you stay quiet and let it go.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that we don't just forget umbrellas; we forget people too. We overlook their kindness, efforts, and quiet presence in our lives. We get so used to being protected, helped, and loved that we often don't see the hands that support us. Some people are like umbrellas. They are there when life gets tough. They shield us in ways we don't always notice. They remind us what to bring, prepare what we need, fix what we break, and stick with us through everyday moments. Since they are always around, we sometimes assume they will always be there.

Then, when they leave or when they get tired, we start to see their worth. This is one of the unfortunate patterns of human life. We often appreciate things only after we lose them. We realize the value of a handkerchief only when sweat is running down our face, the value of money when it becomes hard to find, and the value of time after it has gone. Most painfully,

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we understand the importance of people when their chair is empty, their voice is missing, and their care is no longer available.

The umbrella makes me think of this. When it's not raining, it might stay in a corner, unseen and forgotten. Still, its value remains whether it's needed or not. My grandmother understood this better than I did. She knew that not everything thrown away deserves to be forgotten. Looking back, I see that my grandmother was like the umbrella she fixed. She wasn't loud about what she did. She didn't ask for praise. She just helped, fixed, saved, and protected quietly. Her love was practical. It wasn't always shown in long words. Now that I'm older, I realize that life is full of blessings that don't always look impressive. Many blessings are ordinary, old, or worn with time. Some take the form of people we see every day and often fail to appreciate. Yes, an umbrella may be simple, but it teaches an important lesson. Whenever I see umbrellas left by doors or forgotten in corners, I think of my grandmother, the umbrella she repaired, and the lesson that came with it. Under my grandmother's umbrella, I learned to see value in what others ignore and to recognize love in simple actions. Long after the rain stopped, that lesson stayed with me, and I will always treasure it.

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Quim B. Miolata
Assistant Professor, AB English Language Department
Agusan del Sur State University
Bunawan, Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20725623

Unseen Hands

I couldn't forget that very time in my life when my mother told me: "Child, obey your parents in all things for this is well-pleasing to the Lord". It was in the early days of September 1999. Why not? It's a verse from Holy Scripture, but I never perceived it to be of much value. It was not because I detested the words of God, nor did I easily shun being sermonized. It's just that I think it was because of one thing, my parents. Even I couldn't figure out why.

"Nay, I'll go with my classmates to the beach tomorrow, po. It's Saturday, there's no class," I said one morning while I was preparing for school.

"No," she answered straight away without even looking at me, and continued putting some clothes into the tub. "Nay, please..." I pleaded. "I must be there".

"Is that important, dong?" She addressed me in my Bisayan nickname. "It's to me!" I retorted.
I saw her face turn bitter. "You'll stay here tomorrow. No one will be left in the house. Your tatay and I will…"

"N-never mind, Nay, forget it!" I said, then walked out of the house, rudely slamming the door. I heard her voice yelling at me. I ran as swiftly as I could before she could render me a lengthy sermon. She didn't understand. Surely, my friends will all be angry if I am not with the group. I ran and ran, not knowing where. Then a sudden thought came to mind: My friends could get what they'd asked for from their parents. Why couldn't I? Do my parents really love me? I envied my friends. I trod the road sadly, so greatly disappointed.

Suddenly, I noticed that I was on the road I'd never taken before. Something had changed in the surroundings for just a moment. I looked around; all was new. There were no houses, and all I could see were trees and grass at both ends of the road. Am I dreaming? Or is my sight deceiving me? I rubbed my eyes. It was no dream. Now I realized…I was lost! I heard my chest throbbing rapidly like a drum. I wondered deeply why I had come to that lonely place.

"What are you looking for, friend?" asked a strange voice. I turned my back and got a sight of a thin gentleman in a tattered dress. He was smiling at me. I hadn't seen him before, and surely he didn't know me as well. "What are you looking for?" he asked for a second time. I finally managed to say something. "I-I'm lost, I don't know where I am," I stammered.

He eyed me, trying to figure out if I was really telling the truth. "You seem lost indeed," he said. "Come with me. There's no other house here". He then took the bend of the road to the left. I followed him. We came into an old hut. I was enchanted by his hospitality, which reflects the unique Filipino culture and sets it apart from all others.

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I learned that his name was Antonio and that he was an orphan. He told me that he was five years old then when his father died of lung cancer. His mother suffered from heart failure and passed away during his teenage years. He stopped schooling at that time and worked day and night to support himself. "You're very fortunate your parents are still there for you. I missed the moment when my mother and father were still alive," he sadly said to me.

When I probed further, he told me that he was the cause of the early death of his mother. He was naughty and stubborn, he said, which led to his mother's heart ailment. "This is a punishment for me," he tearfully exclaimed of his lot. I couldn't understand myself when I heard those words from him. I couldn't help but make a sob. I then looked back at what I did earlier to Nanay. My heart aches with a heavy weight.

Antonio tried to smile at me, though both of us had wet cheeks. I unwittingly flashed him a smile. He invited me to eat the budbod he prepared with him (a Filipino native delicacy of glutinous rice and coconut), but I refused. "Thanks for the food and for your kindness, bay, but I have to go now. My parents are worried about me. I was not able to ask consent from them before I left".

He accompanied me to the spot where I stopped earlier. "What if you are lost again?" he worriedly asked me in the midst of the road. "God will show me the right road, bay," I unconsciously replied. When we reached the place, he told me, "I know you'll find the right path. Always trust God, no matter what, and He will enlighten your heart." I couldn't understand my feelings when he uttered those words. I was as if relieved. Before I left, I thanked him.

As I walked alone on the road, a thought struck me: when I got home, I would apologize to my parents, especially to Nanay, for what I did. My goodness! I longed for them so much. I couldn't explain why, as if I hadn't seen them for years! All of a sudden, I noticed the road was narrowing. The next moment was a blur. I recalled being too frail to stride. Then, somehow, the surroundings were getting dim.

I woke up in the bed in that little room. Glaring lights burst into my eyes. I fixed myself and went out. I saw my mother sitting in our small dining room. She was smiling at me. "Nay, I'm very sorry!" were the only words I'd uttered tearfully when I saw her. She was staring at me, perplexed. I uttered nothing, not even a single word, after. I innocently hugged and hugged her as an innocent tot does.

I talked to her about the incident. She told me there was no doubt in her mind that I had encountered a nightmare before that time. Even my friends could hardly believe it. I know most would consider the incident impossible or unlikely, but for me, it's a true experience I'll keep and a lesson to cherish forever.

Today, as I look back, I understand that it was all God's purpose, to make sense to me how great a mother is and to know the real value of what my parents have always told me: "Child, obey your parents in all things for this is well-pleasing to the Lord."

(This story is a tribute to my mother, who left us fourteen years ago due to heart failure. So long, Nanay Adelfa.)

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+639543906965



Jevy M. Languia
Student
Apayao State College
Malama, Conner, Apayao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20733322

Worn Leather Wings

My worn leather wings drag through the dust,
Frayed by the miles, yet rise they must.
Each crack and crease, a silent song,
Whispering softly, "*You still belong*."

The wind grows cold on the twilight plain,
And doubt falls gently like silver rain.
Yet embers hidden beneath the night
Still kiss the darkness with stubborn light.

My mother's prayers are threads of gold,
Woven through storms both fierce and cold.
My father's hands, though rough with years,
Built bridges across my deepest fears.

The road is stone, the sky unsure,
But hope remains a faithful cure.
What others see as scars and strain,
I wear as jewels earned through pain.

Though my wings are tattered, thin, and worn,
They carry the promise of every dawn.
For dreams, like rivers, carve their way,
Through mountains standing in their sway.

And when the horizon finally sings,
I'll thank the dust upon my wings.
For every stumble, every fall,
Was teaching me how to rise through all.

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Maryjoy M. Mabanag
Student
Apayao State College
Malama, Conner, Apayao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20733894

Shaping My Teaching Identity: A Reflective Internship Journey

Teaching internship is a significant component of teacher education because it provides pre-service teachers with authentic exposure to the realities of classroom practice. It functions as the bridge between theoretical knowledge and lived classroom experience, where pedagogical beliefs are tested, refined, and sometimes challenged. My internship at Caglayan Elementary School became a formative experience that reshaped not only my teaching skills but also my understanding of what it means to facilitate learning in a real classroom.

On my first day, I entered the classroom with a mixture of nervousness, excitement, and uncertainty. While I had studied classroom management and lesson planning theories in university, I quickly realized that knowing concepts does not automatically translate into confident execution. I initially believed that being well-prepared with a lesson plan would be sufficient to maintain control and engagement. This assumption was immediately challenged when I faced real-time student behavior, unpredictable pacing, and varying attention spans. It became clear that teaching requires adaptive thinking rather than rigid implementation of plans.

One of the most critical turning points in my internship occurred during a group activity in one of my early lessons. Despite preparing structured instructions, I observed that students became noisy and disengaged midway through the task. My initial response was to repeat instructions and attempt to regain control verbally, but this was ineffective. The situation escalated into confusion, and I lost instructional time. After the lesson, my cooperating teacher pointed out that my instructions were too lengthy and lacked staged modeling. She demonstrated how breaking tasks into smaller steps and physically modeling expectations could reduce cognitive overload for young learners. This moment was significant because it revealed a gap between my theoretical understanding and practical application of instructional clarity.

From this experience, I began to understand classroom management not as control or discipline alone, but as **structured support for learning behavior**. This aligns with the idea that effective classroom management is closely tied to instructional design, where clarity, routine, and engagement strategies reduce disruptive behavior. I gradually adjusted my approach by establishing consistent routines, simplifying instructions, and anticipating student responses. Over time, I noticed improved student focus and smoother transitions, reinforcing the idea that management is preventive rather than reactive.

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Lesson preparation also became an area of transformation. Initially, I treated lesson plans as fixed scripts. However, classroom reality required flexibility. I encountered moments where activities ran shorter or longer than expected, requiring immediate adjustment. I began to understand lesson planning as a **responsive framework rather than a rigid structure**, where anticipating variability is more important than perfect execution. This shift improved my ability to manage time and maintain instructional flow.

Another significant learning area was differentiated instruction. In my classroom, learners demonstrated varying levels of comprehension and pacing. Some students could quickly grasp concepts, while others required repeated scaffolding and guided practice. This experience made me reconsider a uniform teaching approach. I began applying informal scaffolding strategies, such as guided questioning and peer assistance. This aligns with the principle that learning is most effective when instruction is adjusted within the learner's zone of development, rather than delivered uniformly. As a result, I became more attentive to individual learning needs rather than focusing solely on whole-class progress.

Communication with my cooperating teacher and school community further shaped my professional growth. Feedback played a crucial role in refining my practice, particularly regarding pacing, clarity of instruction, and classroom presence. Initially, I perceived feedback as corrective, but I gradually reframed it as a developmental tool essential for reflective practice. This shift strengthened my openness to professional learning and collaboration.

Despite these gains, I continued to face challenges, particularly in managing time under pressure and maintaining consistent engagement throughout lessons. These difficulties highlighted that teaching competence is not developed linearly but through repeated cycles of reflection, adjustment, and re-implementation. I also learned that emotional regulation is a key component of teaching, as classroom unpredictability often requires calm and immediate decision-making.

Beyond technical skills, this internship contributed significantly to the formation of my professional identity. I began to see myself not as someone delivering lessons, but as a facilitator of learning who must continuously interpret student needs and adjust instruction accordingly. This shift represents a move from a teacher-centered perspective to a more learner-centered understanding of teaching practice. I also developed resilience and confidence, not because challenges disappeared, but because I learned to navigate them more effectively.

My teaching internship at Caglayan Elementary School was a transformative professional experience that reshaped my instructional beliefs and classroom practices. It revealed that effective teaching is not defined by perfect lesson execution, but by adaptability, responsiveness, and reflective thinking. Moving forward, I aim to continue refining my instructional strategies, strengthening my classroom management approach, and deepening my reflective practice as I develop into a more effective and learner-centered educator.

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Suzette DC. Domingo, PhD
Head, Filipino Department IOLL
Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology
Nueva Ecija, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20747975

Biniro ng Kapalaran

Biniro ka ng kapalaran
Pinagtagpo ng ‘ di inaasahan
Panahong may kanya-kanyang pamilyang umaasa
Hindi dapt mabuo mali mula umpisa

Pagsubok na dumating
Bakit kay hirap mong harapin?
Hindi ko sukat akalain na ito ay mananaig
Mali ang simula kaya dapat ng putulin’

O kay lupit mo tadaha!
Prinsipyo ko’y nawala
Dignidad ko’y bumaba
Sa sitwasyong di ko inakala

Ngunit tadahana din ang lumikha
Hindi inaasahay naganap na
Parehong nagging Malaya
Sa kadenang naka-tanikala

Mali man ang naging simula
Umaaasang maging payapa
Sa mundong magulo at kumplikado
Sagot ang unawaan at respeto

Magkaiba man ang aming prinsipyo
Ako’y mataas siya nama’y sensitibo
Madalas mang magkatampuhan
Ngunit hindi susukuan

Dalawang kaluluwang pinagtagpo
Magkaiba ang kinalakhan at pagkatao
Virgo at Cancer kay hiwaga mo
Nawa’y hanggang dulo magkasama tayo

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Raymond D. Garcia, EdD
Associate Professor II
Apayao State College
San Isidro Sur, Luna, Apayao – CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20748625

Nang Sandaling Magtagpo ang Dalawang Linya

Sa isang tahimik na baryo, may isang dalagitang nagngangalang Mira na kilala sa kanilang paaralan bilang "reyna ng matematika." Para sa kanya, ang mundo ay binubuo ng mga eksaktong sagot, may tama at may mali, walang gitna. Ngunit sa kabila ng kanyang husay sa mga numero, may bahagi ng kanyang buhay na tila hindi niya kayang lutasin.

Nagsimula ang lahat sa unang araw ng klase sa senior high. Naupo siya sa pinakalikod, tangan ang kanyang kuwaderno na puno ng mga equation. Doon niya nakilala si Eli, isang binatang mahilig sa sining, tula, at musika. Magkaibang-magkaiba sila. Kung si Mira ay lohika ang sandigan, si Eli naman ay damdamin.

"Para kang equation," biro ni Eli isang hapon habang magkatabi silang gumagawa ng proyekto. "Mahirap intindihin, pero kapag na-solve mo, may sense naman pala."

Napangiti si Mira. Hindi niya inaasahan na may makakapagpatawa sa kanya sa ganitong paraan.

Unti-unti, nagbago ang pananaw ni Mira. Ang dating mundo niyang puro guhit at tuldok ay nagkaroon ng kulay. Kasama si Eli, natutunan niyang hindi lahat ng bagay ay kailangang eksakto. May mga bagay na sapat na ang maramdaman.

Ngunit tulad ng isang komplikadong equation, hindi naging madali ang lahat. Sa pagitan ng kanilang pagkakaibigan, may mga "x" at "y" na hindi nila maipaliwanag. Bakit tila may kakaibang kaba sa tuwing magkatabi sila? Bakit tila may kulang kapag wala ang isa? Ngunit sa kabila nito, walang naglakas-loob na magtanong.

Isang gabi, habang sila'y naglalakad pauwi, napansin ni Mira ang katahimikan ni Eli. "May problema ba?" tanong niya. "Meron," sagot ni Eli. "Pero hindi ko alam kung paano i-solve." "Subukan mong ipaliwanag," ani Mira, sanay sa pag-aanalisa.

Napangiti si Eli, ngunit may lungkot sa kanyang mga mata. "Paano kung ang problema ay ikaw?"

Napatigil si Mira. Parang biglang nagulo ang lahat ng kanyang alam. Hindi ito simpleng equation na may formula. Hindi ito kayang i-solve ng lohika.

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"Hindi ko maintindihan," mahina niyang tugon. "Alam ko," sabi ni Eli. "Kasi kahit ako, hindi rin."

Mula noon, nagbago ang lahat. Unti-unting lumayo si Eli. Ang dating magkatabing linya ay naging dalawang paralelang hindi na nagtatagpo. Kahit anong pilit ni Mira na hanapin ang sagot, tila mas lalo lamang lumalabo ang lahat.

Sa kanyang pag-iisa, napagtanto ni Mira na ang puso pala ay parang fraction, nahahati, nalilito, at mahirap pagsamahin. Sinubukan niyang hanapin ang "common denominator," ngunit hindi sapat ang kanyang kaalaman sa matematika upang pag-isahin ang kanilang damdamin. Lumipas ang mga buwan. Isang araw, nagkita silang muli sa isang school event. Sa gitna ng maraming tao, nagkatagpo ang kanilang mga mata—parang dalawang linya na muling nag-intersect sa isang punto.

"Kamusta ka na?" tanong ni Eli. "Ayos lang," sagot ni Mira, kahit hindi sigurado kung totoo iyon.

Tahimik silang naglakad papunta sa gilid ng gym. Doon, muling bumalik ang mga tanong na matagal nilang iniwasan.

"Alam mo," sabi ni Mira, "akala ko dati, lahat ng problema may solusyon."
"At ngayon?" tanong ni Eli. "Ngayon, naiintindihan ko na… may mga bagay na hindi kailangang i-solve. Kailangan lang tanggapin."

Ngumiti si Eli. "Siguro, hindi tayo meant na maging sagot sa isa't isa." "Siguro," tugon ni Mira. "Pero naging bahagi ka ng equation ng buhay ko."

Sa sandaling iyon, naunawaan ni Mira ang isang mahalagang aral. Ang buhay ay hindi lamang tungkol sa paghahanap ng tamang sagot. Minsan, ito'y tungkol sa paglalakbay sa pagitan ng mga variable, sa mga pagkakataong tayo'y nagkakamali, natututo, at nagbabago. Habang pinagmamasdan niya si Eli na unti-unting lumalayo, hindi na siya nasaktan tulad ng dati. Sa halip, may kakaibang kapanatagan sa kanyang puso.

Dahil sa wakas, natutunan niyang hindi lahat ng linya ay kailangang magsama. May mga linya na sapat nang magtagpo, kahit isang beses lang, upang magbigay ng kahulugan sa buong graph ng ating buhay.

At sa kanyang kuwaderno, sa pagitan ng mga numero at simbolo, nagsulat si Mira ng isang bagong equation, hindi para lutasin, kundi para alalahanin.

Dahil sa mundong puno ng komplikasyon, siya pa rin ang may hawak ng panulat.
At sa lahat ng variable ng kanyang buhay, siya ang magbibigay ng kahulugan.

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Raymond D. Garcia, EdD
Associate Professor II
Apayao State College
San Isidro Sur, Luna, Apayao – CAR, Philippines
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The Equation of Us

In the quiet town of San Isidro, where afternoons stretched lazily beneath golden sunlight, lived a young man named Adrian. He had always believed that life was something you could solve, as the equations scribbled endlessly in his worn notebook. Numbers made sense to him. They followed rules, obeyed logic, and always, in one way or another, led to an answer.

Adrian first met Lira in a classroom filled with chalk dust and half-erased formulas. She sat by the window, her fingers tracing invisible patterns in the air, as if solving problems no one else could see. Their teacher had just written a complicated equation on the board.

"Find the value of x," the teacher said.

Adrian solved it quickly, as always. But when he glanced sideways, he noticed Lira staring not at the board, but outside, her eyes distant, thoughtful.

"Did you get it?" Adrian asked after class.

Lira smiled faintly. "Maybe. But I think some things aren't meant to be solved that easily."

That was the first variable Adrian couldn't define.

Their friendship grew like a sequence, step by step, predictable yet somehow surprising. They studied together, walked home along the same dusty road, and shared quiet conversations that drifted from mathematics to dreams, from logic to longing.

Adrian began to notice patterns in her, how she laughed at the smallest things, how her voice softened when she spoke of her family, how her eyes dimmed when she thought no one was looking.

She was not an equation. She was an entire system.

Life, Adrian realized, was not simple arithmetic. It was filled with unknowns, x and y scattered across moments, waiting for meaning.

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One evening, as the sky bled into hues of orange and violet, they sat beneath an old acacia tree. Adrian, holding his notebook, hesitated before speaking.

"Do you ever feel like we're… variables?" he asked.

Lira tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

"Like we don't know where we belong in the equation. Like we're just… waiting to be solved."

Lira looked at him, her eyes reflecting the fading light. "Maybe we're not meant to be solved," she said softly. "Maybe we're meant to understand."

Her answer lingered in Adrian's mind long after they parted that night. Days turned into months, and something between them shifted, something unspoken yet deeply felt. Their conversations grew quieter, heavier. Adrian found himself divided, his thoughts split between certainty and confusion.

He wanted to tell her.

But fear was a negative value he couldn't eliminate.

One afternoon, during a sudden downpour, they found themselves running for shelter beneath a small waiting shed. Rain fell in sheets around them, the world blurring into indistinct lines.

It felt like an intersection, two paths meeting, however briefly.

"Lira," Adrian began, his voice unsteady, "what if… what if we're more than just friends?"

The question hung between them like an unsolved equation.

Lira didn't answer immediately. She watched the rain, her expression unreadable.

"Adrian," she said finally, "have you ever seen parallel lines?"

He frowned slightly. "Of course. They run side by side but never meet."

She nodded. "That's what we are."

The words struck him harder than he expected.

"But… we're here," Adrian argued softly. "Right now."

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"Yes," she said, turning to him with a sad smile. "Sometimes, even parallel lines seem like they intersect… when you look at them from a certain angle."

Adrian felt something in his chest collapse, like an equation falling apart.

"But eventually," she continued, "they go their separate ways."

Silence settled between them, broken only by the rhythm of rain. That was the moment Adrian understood that some problems didn't have solutions you wanted.

Time moved on, as it always did. Graduation came, and with it, the inevitability of change. Lira was leaving for the city to pursue her dreams. Adrian stayed behind, rooted in familiarity.

On her last day, they met again beneath the acacia tree.

"I guess this is it," Adrian said, forcing a small smile.

Lira nodded. "Not everything has to last forever to matter."

He handed her his notebook, the one filled with equations, notes, and scribbles of a life he once believed he understood.

"Take it," he said. "Maybe you'll find the answers I couldn't."

Lira accepted it gently. "Adrian," she said, her voice trembling slightly, "you don't always need answers. Sometimes, understanding is enough."

He watched her walk away, each step creating a distance he could no longer measure. For a long time, Adrian struggled. His world felt like a fraction without a common denominator, divided, incomplete, and difficult to comprehend. He questioned everything: his choices, his feelings, even the logic he once trusted.

But slowly, something changed.

He began to see life differently.

Not as a rigid equation demanding exact answers, but as a complex system of relationships between moments, choices, and emotions. He realized that not all variables needed to be solved. Some were meant to exist, to challenge, to teach.

Years later, Adrian became a teacher.

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Standing before his own students, he wrote a simple equation on the board. He watched as they tried to solve it, their brows furrowed in concentration.

"Remember," he said, turning to them, "every problem has a solution… but not always the one you expect."

A student raised a hand. "Sir, what if we can't find the answer?" Adrian smiled.

"Then maybe," he said, "the answer is not what you're supposed to find."

As the bell rang and the students filed out, Adrian looked at the empty classroom. For a brief moment, he thought of Lira, the girl who had once been his greatest unknown.

He no longer saw her as an unsolved variable. She was a lesson.

And in the vast equation of his life, Adrian finally understood his role, not just as someone searching for answers, but as someone capable of creating meaning.

Because in the end, he realized something simple yet profound; He was both the problem and the solution. And that was enough.

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Raymond D. Garcia, EdD
Associate Professor II
Apayao State College
San Isidro Sur, Luna, Apayao – CAR, Philippines
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The Equation That Solved Me

The classroom was nearly empty when Mateo found the notebook.

It was old, its edges curled, its pages yellowed like forgotten memories. He had stayed behind after class, staring blankly at the algebra written across the board. Numbers had never made sense to him. To Mateo, they were cold, lifeless things, symbols that demanded answers without ever explaining why.

He sighed and slumped into his seat. "What's the point of all this?" he muttered, tapping his pen against the desk.

That's when he noticed the notebook tucked beneath his chair.

Curious, he picked it up and flipped it open. The first page held a simple line written in neat, steady handwriting:

"If you can understand mathematics, you can understand life."

Mateo scoffed. "Yeah, right."

But something about it made him keep reading.

The next few pages were filled with equations, but not the kind he saw in textbooks. These were… different.

One page read:
Choices + Consequences = Outcomes
Another:
Time – Distractions = Progress

Mateo frowned. "This isn't math," he whispered. "This is… life."

He leaned back, thinking of his own situation. His grades were slipping. His parents argued constantly. He didn't know what he wanted to do after graduation. Everything felt like a mess, like variables scattered without order.

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His teacher's voice echoed faintly in his memory: "An equation must be balanced to make sense."

Balanced.

Mateo looked at his own life. Late nights on his phone. Skipping study time. Avoiding conversations at home. Everything was tilted, nothing was equal.

"Maybe… that's the problem," he murmured.

Over the next few days, Mateo kept the notebook with him. Each page revealed something new.

One entry showed a simple equation:
Effort × Time = Growth

He tested it. He started small, reviewing lessons for just thirty minutes each night. At first, nothing changed. But slowly, like numbers increasing in a steady pattern, he began to understand. Concepts that once confused him started to click.

It reminded him of something else written in the notebook:

Small values, when multiplied consistently, create exponential results.

"Exponential…" Mateo said, smiling slightly. "So that's how it works."

Another page spoke of probability:
Not all outcomes are certain, but wise choices increase the likelihood of favorable results.

That one stayed with him.

He thought about his fear of failure, how he avoided trying because he might not succeed. But now he saw it differently. Life wasn't about guaranteed answers. It was about increasing the chances of something better.

So he raised his hand in class for the first time in weeks.

He was wrong.

But for once, he didn't feel defeated.

"Good attempt," his teacher said. "You're getting there."

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And somehow, that felt like progress.

At home, things were still tense. His parents' arguments hadn't magically disappeared. But one night, Mateo remembered another equation:

Burden ÷ Sharing = Lighter Load
He hesitated outside their door, then knocked.
"I… just want to talk," he said softly.

It wasn't a perfect conversation. There were still misunderstandings, still emotions that couldn't be solved instantly. But it was a start, a small division of a heavyweight.

And it made things just a little easier.

Weeks passed, and Mateo began to see life differently.

Addition became the friendships he nurtured.

Subtraction became one of the habits he let go of.

Multiplication became the moments of joy that grew when shared.

Division became the struggle that lessened when he stopped carrying them alone.
Life, he realized, wasn't separate from mathematics.

It was mathematics.

One afternoon, as the sun cast golden light across the classroom, Mateo reached the final page of the notebook.

There, written clearly and boldly, was the concluding equation:
Life + Love = Happy
Life – Love = Sad
2 Life = Happy + Sad

Therefore, Life = $\frac{\text{Happy + Sad}}{2}$
and Life = Happy + Sad.

He stared at it for a long time.

Half happiness.

Half sadness.

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"That's it?" he whispered.

At first, it seemed too simple. Too incomplete.

But then he understood.

Life was never meant to be purely joyful or entirely painful. It was a balance, a shifting equation where both happiness and sadness coexist, shaping who we become.

Mateo closed the notebook and smiled, not because everything in his life was perfect, but because it finally made sense.

For the first time, he wasn't afraid of the unknown variables.

Because now, he knew how to solve them.

And more importantly…

He knew how to live with them.

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Raymond D. Garcia, EdD
Associate Professor II
Apayao State College
San Isidro Sur, Luna, Apayao – CAR, Philippines
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The Equation They Refused to Solve

The bell rang sharply, slicing through the quiet murmur of the hallway. Inside Room 204, chalk dust lingered in the air like a memory that refused to settle. Mr. Alvarez stood by the board, staring at the equation he had written minutes before the class arrived:

$x + y = ?$

Simple. Clean. Open.

But the room it lived in was nothing but curiosity.

Students trickled in, their voices low, their movements cautious, as if the walls themselves had expectations. On the roster beside Mr. Alvarez's desk were labels printed in neat columns: *Below Standard. At Risk. Intervention Needed.* He had seen those words before he met their faces.

"Good morning," he said, trying to keep his voice steady.

A few answered. Most didn't.

In the third row sat Lila, her notebook closed, eyes fixed on the corner of her desk. Behind her, Marco tapped his pencil rhythmically, a habit that masked his unease. Near the window, Jonas leaned back, arms crossed, not defiant, just distant.

Mr. Alvarez turned to the board. "Today, we're solving for unknowns," he said. "But not just numbers. Patterns. Possibilities."

A few students exchanged glances. Possibilities felt like a foreign language here.

He wrote again, pressing the chalk harder than necessary:

$x + y = possibility$

"Let's start simple," he continued. "What could x be?"

Silence.

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He waited. The kind of silence that stretched long enough to reveal something deeper, not confusion, but hesitation. The kind built over years of being told what you are not.

"Marco?" he tried gently.

Marco shrugged. "Don't know, sir."

"You could guess."

"Guessing's wrong most of the time."

There it was, the quiet rule no one had written but everyone followed: mistakes were not part of learning; they were evidence.

Mr. Alvarez nodded slowly. "What if being wrong is part of finding what's right?"

No one answered.

The lesson moved on, but it felt like pushing against something invisible. Each response was tentative, each pause heavier than the last. It wasn't the math that held them back, it was the weight they carried into the room.

Later, as students worked on their problems, Mr. Alvarez walked between desks. He stopped beside Lila.

Her paper was blank.

"Want help getting started?" he asked.

She shook her head slightly. "I won't get it anyway."

"That's not true."

She looked up, meeting his eyes for the first time. "It always is."

He hesitated. There were no equations for this.

Instead, he pulled a chair beside her. "What do you think *x* could be?" he asked softly.

She stared at the board, then back at her paper. "Anything," she whispered.

"Exactly," he said. "So pick something."

She hesitated, then wrote a small number. Just a 2. Barely visible.

"Now try it," he encouraged.

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Her hand moved slowly, uncertain but deliberate. She substituted, calculated, paused, and then looked up again, surprised.

"It… works?"

Mr. Alvarez smiled. "It does."

For a moment, something shifted. Not the room, not the system—but something quieter. Internal. A small crack in a long-standing belief.

Across the room, Jonas suddenly sat forward. "Sir," he called out, frowning at his paper. "What if there's more than one answer?"

Mr. Alvarez turned, heart quickening. "That's a good question. What do you think?"

Jonas glanced around, then back at his work. "I think… there is."

"Then show me."

The class didn't transform that day. The labels didn't disappear. The system didn't rewrite itself overnight.

But there were moments.

Small, stubborn moments.

Marco raised his hand once, just once to check if his answer could still be right even if he got there a different way. Lila filled half a page before the bell rang. Jonas stayed after class, asking about equations that didn't have a single solution.

Moments that didn't erase the weight, but challenged it.

That afternoon, alone in the classroom, Mr. Alvarez erased the board. The chalk squeaked softly as $x + y = possibility$ faded into white dust.

He paused, then wrote something new:

$Value \neq Label$

He stepped back, staring at it.

The system still existed beyond those walls, structured, rigid, quietly shaping expectations. It would continue to measure, sort, and define.

But here, at least for an hour each day, there was space to question it.

Space to rewrite.

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Because the students in Room 204 were never the problem to solve.

They were never just variables waiting to be defined by someone else's equation.

They were constants of something deeper, resilience, potential, stories still unfolding.

And maybe, just maybe, the real lesson was not about finding the value of x.

But about realizing that its worth was never missing in the first place.

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Julhusin B. Jalisan, DBA, DPA, RCE
Dean, College of Business Administration
Negros Oriental State University
Bais Campus - Negros Oriental, Negros Island Region, Philippine
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No Collateral, No Interest: Could Shariah Finance Be the Lifeline Poor Farmers Need?

Many Filipino farmers exist within a cyclical poverty trap, where farming equates to bare survival. They toil the land due to extreme perseverance, a sense of responsibility, or no other choice left. However, underlying all these issues, and most fundamentally responsible for this cycle, is a lack of capital. Without sufficient funds to buy quality seeds, fertilizer, or equipment, productivity remains low—and this reality lays bare a clear failure: government-backed financial institutions have not been able to provide credit that is truly affordable and within reach of ordinary farmers.

Many studies consistently show that access to credit is one of the most important keys to improving farm production. In the Philippines and many other developing countries, most farmers own only small plots and operate with very little starting capital, keeping them stuck at the subsistence level. Even the best government agricultural programs can only do so much if farmers are unable to borrow the money they need to invest in their land and labor.

In the Philippines, Presidential Decree 717, commonly known as the Agri-Agra law, was passed to require banks to devote 25 percent of their net resources to agribusiness (15 percent) and agri-agrarian beneficiaries (10 percent). The Land Bank of the Philippines (LBP) was intended to serve as the conduit for rural loans. However, the law has not lived up to its promise. Available data tells a clear story: only about 28% of rice farmers and 32% of corn farmers managed to get formal loans. For corn growers, the average amount borrowed was hardly enough to make a real difference. While cooperatives were the most common source of credit, less than 4% of farmers received help from government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture or LBP, and fewer than 1% received loans directly from the bank itself.

Loopholes in the Agri-Agra law allow banks to deposit the mandated investments in treasury bills as an alternative form of compliance. As a result, the large plantations received the lion's share of the loans while small farmers were left with almost nothing. The small farmers then approach informal and cooperative lenders who demand high interest rates. Given these failures, would it not be a good idea for the government to study the Shariah financial system as an alternative lifeline for poor farmers?

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At its core, Shariah finance is built on a simple but powerful principle: the prohibition of usury, or the charging of fixed interest. It is not meant to replace conventional banking entirely, but it offers features that could be life-changing for farmers, most of whom have no collateral. In this system, financiers do not profit from interest; instead, they share in the actual profits of the farm or business, based on investments that are ethical and permissible under Islamic guidelines. Equally important, the risk is borne by both the lender and the farmer. Repayments will be demanded only when the farm begins to make money, so if the crops fail or prices plunge, farmers do not bear the full burden. With conventional lending, people are often stuck in a spiral of debt: the obligations stay the same even when the income disappears.

In practice, the Shariah financial system treats financing as a form of charity rather than as a transaction for the beneficiary's net gain. Borrowing is considered a partnership, with risks and profits shared by both sides. A poor farmer will not be obliged to pay fixed interest; repayment will depend on revenues generated, which insulates him from circumstances that increase his costs. Farmers will, however, have to allow their operations to be examined more closely than in conventional banking, a compromise that may well be worthwhile.

Unlike most Western-style banks, Shariah institutions do not engage in fractional-reserve banking or in creating money from nothing. They allocate only from the money that has actually been deposited with them for lending. Their operations are more stable, and their returns to depositors come from real profits, not promises of unsustainable high rates, which are often made to attract people. In fact, today there are about 200 Islamic financial institutions in at least 48 countries that control billions of dollars in assets, evidence that the model works and that substantial numbers of people can benefit from it.

Could a Shariah-inspired financial system work in the Philippines? There is no definite answer yet, and it would require careful study, adaptation, and regulation. However, for poor farmers who have waited so long for real change, exploring this alternative is not just an interesting idea, it is a prudent, necessary step toward giving them a fair chance to lift themselves out of poverty. After all, as the American philosopher William James once wrote, "Anything that makes a difference makes a difference."

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Dionisio E. Briñosa, Ed.D
Associate Prof. 1
Deputy Director for Student Support and Engagement
Mindoro State Unibersity - Bongabong Campus
Labasan, Bongabong, Oriental Mindoro MIMAROPA
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The Path of the Sun-Baked Clay: The Journey of Life

In 1985, in the quiet town of Bansud, Oriental Mindoro, success was not measured by what you owned, but by what you were willing to endure. For a young boy named Dionisio, life was defined by the sharp scent of floor wax, the rough edges of secondhand books, and the heavy humidity of a classroom that offered no shortcuts.

Four kilometers. That was the distance between Dionisio's home and the school gates. Every single morning, long before the sun could burn the mist off the fields, he began his daily pilgrimage. There was no money for tricycle fares. His lunch was a humble token of love, wrapped by his mother in a banana leaf softened over an open flame. Inside was a simple mound of rice paired with a single grilled tuyo tunsoy or sapsap. By noontime, the heat would infuse the rice with the earthy aroma of the leaf, a scent that, even forty years later, would always taste like grit and determination.

To earn a few centavos for a pencil or a sheet of pad paper, Dionisio became a young entrepreneur. On his long walk to school, he would scout the wayside, filling his pockets with wild cherries and plump, low-hanging guavas. In the classroom, he did not hide his poverty; he used it as fuel, proudly selling the fruits to his classmates. Every single centavo earned was a small step toward a larger dream.

However, the road was a fickle companion. When the monsoon season arrived, the quiet river cutting through their path would transform into a rushing, muddy torrent. Dionisio and his siblings would stand at the bank, hoisting their school bags high above their heads, testing the slippery stones beneath the water, and praying they would not be swept away. Many mornings, he sat through his first lessons, soaking wet, letting his uniform dry in the classroom's humid breeze while he focused on the blackboard.

Weekends offered no rescue from the labor. The fields called to him and his siblings. Under the uncompromising heat of the sun, they cleared brush and planted crops. In those days, discipline was unyielding; a moment of laziness was quickly corrected by a sharp reprimand or the sting of a parent's slipper. It was not done out of malice, but out of a fierce, desperate desire to teach them how to survive a harsh world.

A beautiful milestone came when his father managed to bring home a heavy, black-and-white television set. In a neighborhood without electricity, this was a wonder. It ran on a massive, acid-filled wet battery, the kind used for trucks. For a few glorious hours, the small screen connected their household to a world beyond the mountains of Mindoro. However, the joy was fragile. Eventually, the characters on the screen would shrink, the audio would

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warp into a low hum, and the screen would collapse into a single white dot before vanishing into darkness.

Because there were no charging stations nearby, the heavy battery had to be hauled to the town proper, leaving the house in complete silence for two long days. In those forty-eight hours of waiting, Dionisio did not just sit idle. He realized that while the television relied on a constantly draining battery, the education he was building in his mind was a powerhouse that would never run dry.

Through the hunger, the exhausted muscles, the flooded rivers, and the relentless demands of the farm, Dionisio held on. He refused to accept that the circumstances of his birth dictated the boundaries of his life. In a community where, young men were expected to leave school early to till the soil, he shattered the glass ceiling. He became the very first person in his locality to graduate from elementary school, attend high school, and ultimately earn a college degree.

However, true exploration has no final destination. Propelled by his personal mantra, "Do not be satisfied with what you have now... explore for more" he kept climbing. He pushed through advanced studies, eventually earning his Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) and becoming a highly respected University Associate Professor and a Deputy Director for Student Support and Engagement.

Four decades later, by the year 2026, the rugged, dusty dirt tracks of his childhood have been replaced by smooth, black asphalt and concrete. The roads now reach all the way into the remote area where his old family home stands. Sitting across his 20-year-old son, Paul Arch, who is now pursuing his own college degree with a sleek tablet and high-speed internet, Dionisio watches the beautiful collision of two different eras over a warm plate of adobo.

On one side sits the generation of scarcity, built on raw "sabi nga ng marami - diskarte (resourcefulness). On the other hand, sits the generation of abundance, requiring deep adaptability.

As Dionisio looks at his son and the future generations who will read his story, his message remains clear, human, and timeless:

Comfort is a beautiful thing, but it is also the enemy of growth. If I had been satisfied with the smell of the banana leaf lunch, I would have stayed in the fields forever. If I had been satisfied with the flickering black-and-white TV, I would have never looked past the horizon of our village. Never settle for the space you are given today. Broaden your world. Let the sacrifices of your past be the roots that hold you steady, but let your ambition be the wings that carry you forward.

Dionisio, the boy who walked four kilometers along a muddy, grassy path from home to school with wild cherries in his pockets, stands as living proof: no region is too remote, and no river is too deep for a human spirit that completely refuses to stand still.

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Vimar A. Romero, MST-Biology
Instructor I
Apayao State College-Luna Campus
Apayao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20778967

Beneath the Last Glass Slide

Among the laboratories of Apayao State College, Instructor Romero always saved one slide for last.

It was never written in the syllabus, never included in laboratory manuals, and never mentioned during lectures. His students knew nothing about it. To them, the evening ended routinely with the scraping of chairs, the closing of notebooks, and hurried footsteps escaping the biology laboratory before darkness settled over the campus. However, Romero always remained behind after everyone else had gone.

He waited until the room was completely silent. Beneath old attendance sheets and outdated inventories lay a single glass slide, carefully wrapped in yellowing tissue paper.

The slide was old enough to seem forgotten by the institution itself. Its label had faded into an unreadable blur, and one corner bore a thin crack that was slowly spreading across the glass like a vein. No catalog number identified the specimen anymore. No records explained where it came from or why it remained stored there for so many years.

Romero remembered only one thing with certainty.

The slide had belonged to a student named Elias Navarro.

Even after all these years, the name still lingered in his mind. Elias had been brilliant in quiet ways. While most students memorized diagrams and definitions merely to survive examinations, Elias observed everything with unsettling patience. He always sat near the laboratory windows where afternoon sunlight touched the edge of his notebook. During discussions, he rarely spoke unless curiosity overcame hesitation. When he finally asked questions, they carried a strange seriousness uncommon among undergraduates.

One afternoon, while the class examined onion root tip cells beneath their microscopes, Elias raised his hand without looking away from the lens.

“Sir,” he asked softly, “what happens to cells that fail to divide properly?”

Romero remembered answering immediately, almost mechanically.

“Mutation,” he said. “Dysfunction. Sometimes death.”

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The class continued normally afterward. Pens scratched against paper. Students copied diagrams from the projector. Outside the windows, rain drifted across the campus grounds. However, Elias remained unusually still beside his microscope, staring downward as though searching for something deeper than stained tissue beneath glass.

Two weeks later, he disappeared.

At first, nobody seemed alarmed. Students left universities often. Financial hardship, illnesses, transfers, exhaustion, and private suffering interrupted academic lives every semester. Faculty members eventually learned not to ask too many questions because answers rarely arrived.

However, Mr. Romero remembered noticing the small changes before Elias vanished.

The dark circles beneath his eyes during laboratory sessions.

The unfinished assignments were submitted without explanation.

The careful handwriting gradually became unsteady near the semester's end.

Mr. Romero had noticed everything.

He failed to understand what those signs meant.

Now, years later, he returned to the old slide every evening as though it preserved some unfinished conversation between teacher and student.

He placed the specimen carefully beneath the microscope lens and adjusted the focus knob with practiced precision. Under magnification, the tissue appeared fragile and colorless with age, suspended forever between preservation and decay. Scientifically, there was nothing remarkable about it. The cells revealed no rare mutations or unusual structures. Any professor could have discarded the specimen without hesitation.

Yet Mr. Romero never could.

The laboratory felt different at night. During the day, it belonged to procedure, deadlines, and instruction. However, after hours, beneath weak fluorescent lights and the steady hum of electrical equipment, the laboratory became painfully honest.

There, surrounded by preserved specimens and unlabeled jars, Romero often found himself thinking not about biology, but about absence.

How many students had quietly disappeared through the years?

How many struggles had hidden themselves behind ordinary attendance sheets and examination scores?

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Universities recorded outcomes with cruel simplicity.

Passed.

Failed.

Incomplete.

He leaned closer toward the microscope and remembered the exact tone of Elias's question.

What happens to cells that fail to divide properly?

At the time, Romero answered like a scientist.

Now he wondered whether Elias had been asking something else entirely.

Outside, rain struck softly against the laboratory windows while distant thunder rolled beyond the mountains. Mr. Romero removed his glasses and rubbed his tired eyes. He imagined Elias seated once more beside the window, exhausted but attentive, searching desperately for language to explain something he himself did not fully understand.

Perhaps teaching was not only about transferring knowledge.

Perhaps it was also about recognizing suffering before silence swallowed it completely.

The realization settled heavily inside him.

Mr. Romero adjusted the microscope again, although the image beneath the lens remained unchanged. The specimen stayed motionless beneath the fading light, delicate and incomplete, preserved long after the life surrounding it had vanished.

Suddenly, he understood why he returned to the slide every evening.

It reminded him of students who slipped quietly between semesters carrying burdens no curriculum could measure. It reminded him that some questions that arrived in classrooms were never truly academic. Most painfully, it reminded him that knowledge alone could not save everyone.

The laboratory lights flickered once, warning of the approaching midnight shutdown. Romero removed the slide carefully from the microscope and held it beneath the dim light overhead. For a brief moment, the cracked glass reflected his aging face at him.

He smiled sadly.

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Science could explain mutation, deterioration, and death with perfect precision. Human lives, however, rarely follow orderly patterns. Some stories vanished without explanation. Some questions remained unanswered, no matter how carefully one searched beneath the lens.

Mr. Romero wrapped the slide again in its yellowing tissue paper and returned it gently to the drawer. Then he turned off the microscope, allowing darkness to settle slowly across the silent laboratory.

Moreover, somewhere within that darkness, beneath the memory preserved inside the last glass slide, Instructor Romero finally understood that not all specimens were meant to be understood.

Some were meant to be remembered.

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Vimar A. Romero, MST-Biology
Instructor I
Apayao State College-Luna Campus
Apayao, Philippines
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Silence, After the Laboratory

The biology laboratory of Apayao State College had never truly been quiet.

Even during its calmest hours, it carried its own peculiar rhythm. Refrigerators hummed softly against the walls. Microscopes clicked beneath careful hands. Fluorescent lights vibrated faintly above rows of laboratory benches stained by years of chemicals and hurried experiments. Somewhere within the room, there was always movement, always thought, always the low murmur of learning still in progress.

But tonight, the laboratory stood empty.

Instructor Vim Romero turned off the final switch near the preparation table and watched the fluorescent lights flicker weakly before surrendering to darkness. Shadows stretched slowly across glassware, sinks, and metal cabinets until the room became almost unrecognizable. The semester had officially ended hours earlier. Examination papers were graded and submitted. Laboratory equipment had been cleaned, inventoried, and locked away according to university procedure. Every requirement had been completed carefully, exactly as expected.

And yet something lingered inside the room.

Sir Vim remained standing beside the doorway for several moments, listening instinctively for sounds that no longer existed. He had spent so many years inside laboratories that silence itself now felt unnatural. During semesters, the room breathed with constant activity. Students argued over experimental results, laughed at failed procedures, borrowed pens moments before quizzes, and whispered anxiously about practical examinations while pretending confidence they rarely possessed.

Now there was nothing.

Only silence.

He walked slowly between the rows of benches, his footsteps echoing faintly against the tiled floor. The familiar scent of alcohol, paper, and old chemicals still clung to the air. On ordinary days, the laboratory felt crowded with urgency, but tonight it resembled a museum abandoned after closing hours.

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As he passed each station, memories surfaced without warning.

Near the front table, he remembered a group of first-year students accidentally shattering a beaker before erupting into nervous laughter. Besides the sinks, he recalled a quiet student who stayed after class every week to repeat microscope observations until she felt certain she understood them. Another memory emerged near the specimen cabinet, where one young man once confessed privately that he feared failing the course because his scholarship depended entirely on passing grades.

Sir Vim had forgotten many examination scores over the years.

Yet moments like those remained painfully clear.

Teaching biology had once seemed straightforward to him. Deliver lectures. Demonstrate procedures. Correct mistakes. Evaluate understanding through examinations and laboratory exercises. Everything followed measurable systems and predictable outcomes.

At least that was what he believed when he first entered the profession.

But semesters slowly changed him.

Over time, he realized students carried invisible burdens into classrooms every single day. Some arrived exhausted from part-time jobs. Others struggled silently with grief, anxiety, illness, or responsibilities waiting beyond the university gates. Many learned to hide their exhaustion so effectively that professors noticed only declining grades after the damage had already deepened.

The institution recorded outcomes with brutal simplicity.

Passed.

Failed.

Incomplete.

Yet nothing in official records ever explained how students survived merely to remain seated in classrooms.

Sir Vim stopped near a laboratory station positioned against the back wall. Beneath the dim emergency lighting, he noticed a faint scratch etched across the wooden surface. The mark was small enough that another instructor might never have seen it at all.

But Sir Vim recognized it immediately.

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Years earlier, the scratch had been accidentally carved by a student named Clara during a particularly difficult laboratory exercise. Clara struggled constantly throughout the semester. Her hands shook while using microscopes. Laboratory reports arrived late and were crowded with corrections. During practical examinations, she often panicked so severely that simple procedures became impossible.

Several classmates quietly assumed she would fail.

Yet Clara never stopped trying.

Even after receiving poor scores, she continued staying after class to repeat experiments alone. Sometimes Sir Vim remained beside her long after sunset while she practiced identifying cellular structures beneath the microscope. She rarely complained. She tried again each time frustration threatened to overwhelm her.

Then, during the final laboratory session of the semester, Clara looked up from the microscope and smiled with exhausted relief.

“Sir,” she said softly, “I think I understand now.”

At the time, Sir Vim merely nodded distractedly while organizing paperwork for submission deadlines. He remembered offering brief encouragement before hurrying toward another responsibility waiting elsewhere.

He never asked what she meant.

Now, years later, standing alone beside the scratched laboratory table, he wished desperately that he had.

Because perhaps she had not been speaking only about biology.

Perhaps understanding arrived differently for every student. Sometimes it emerged through persistence rather than achievement. Sometimes learning had little to do with perfect grades or flawless laboratory technique. Sometimes understanding meant discovering the quiet courage required to continue despite repeated failure.

The realization settled heavily inside him.

Outside the laboratory windows, rain drifted softly across the darkened campus grounds. Vim glanced around the empty room once more and realized that teaching was never only about information delivered through lectures and diagrams. It was also about witnessing fragile moments of transformation that often passed too quickly to be recognized as they happened.

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He moved toward the doorway slowly and rested his hand against the light switch one final time.

Then he closed the laboratory door behind him.

The silence followed him down the hallway, not empty, but filled with every voice, question, mistake, and small moment of understanding that had once made the room feel alive.

And for the first time, Sir Vim understood why certain classrooms remained unforgettable long after semesters disappeared. Knowledge faded. Formulas blurred. Even names were eventually lost to time. But the human moments endured stubbornly, returning in empty laboratories, unfinished conversations, and silence heavy enough to resemble memory itself.

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+639543906965

Karren Boholst Maglangit, CSPE, LPT, MAED ECE
Faculty
Western Mindanao State University – Ipil Campus
Ipil, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20779408

T#E F4BR1C 0F TH3 V3RD1C7

(The Fabric of the Verdict)

They say time is a quiet thief, slipping away while our backs are turned. However, on days like today, it feels more like a master weaver, pulling together the stray threads of who you were and intertwining them with whom you are destined to become. Another revolution around the sun is in the books. It is a marker of existence, sure, but more importantly, it is a threshold, a line drawn in the sand.

We tend to stare at the horizon and wonder what lies beyond, forgetting that the horizon is not a fixed point. It is a boundary just waiting for someone with the grit to push it.

Lately, I have been watching you quietly lay your own brick and mortar. There is a silent, unseen architecture to the hours you have spent in the trenches. It is the kind of discipline that does not beat its own drum; it just echoes deeply in the quiet spaces of your ambition. You have been burning the midnight oil to unlock a specific door, one guarded by standard measures and official seals. The world might see it as just another test of papers and codes, but I see it for what it truly is: the spark that sets the woods on fire.

Consider this message an artifact, a small token brought to you on this specific day of your birth. It is a gift not wrapped in paper or tied with string, but carried in the weight of intent and the absolute, unwavering belief I have in you. Think of it as a mirror held up to your own potential, offered precisely as the calendar aligns. Let it be your anchor when the waiting starts to get heavy.

True strength does not always roar. Sometimes, it is just that quiet voice at the end of the day whispering, "I will get back on the horse tomorrow." However, for you, the tomorrow you have labored for is already bleeding into the present. The die is cast. The effort has been woven entirely into the fabric of your story, and the verdict of that great, structured hurdle will soon reveal what I have known all along: you have already crossed the Rubicon.

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When the dust settles and the official declarations are finally made, the fog will clear. I am looking past the anxiety of the waiting game, and I see a tapestry of brilliant, unyielding light waiting on the other side. Your future is not just promising, it is a radiant, sweeping landscape, blindingly certain.

Happy Birthday, Butternut.

The doorway is already open; you need only walk through.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Joseph P. Nacionales, LPT, MAELLT
Instructor
Department of Languages and Literature
School of Arts and Sciences
Eastern Visayas State University – Main Campus
Tacloban City
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20784858

Balangiga Aftermath

The valiant town in 1901,
It is Balangiga that stood for freedom.

People fleet with anguished outcry
From the deafening silence of post encounter.
In howling wilderness;
No more prisoners left.

Bodies of males above 10 are found lifeless,
Seized by bravery and freedom.

Its dreary river behind the old church,
Unhears the toll of bells drifting in town.
Burned nipa huts and grasses
The dark sky is bleeding with smoke.

A big ship left the coast,
Bringing the bells navigating the pacific,
Taken from the town by white looters.

The aftermath of ruins,
Lay blood-soaked and desolate.

Survivors from the mountains returned,
Seeing fallen Balangigan-ons.
Swallowed in woe.

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+639543906965



Joseph P. Nacionales, LPT, MAELLT
Instructor
Department of Languages and Literature
School of Arts and Sciences
Eastern Visayas State University – Main Campus
Tacloban City
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20785124

Brigadier-General Smith

Arrived with vengeance,
Barked his command:
"Kill everyone over ten."
The town in woe,
Burned nipa huts.
Children drowned in sorrow,
Elder's eyes are brimming with tears.

The notorious general,
Marshaled his men:
More killing,
Burned the town.
Exultant and triumphed
Thousands died,
In howling wilderness.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Joseph P. Nacionales, LPT, MAELLT
Instructor
Department of Languages and Literature
School of Arts and Sciences
Eastern Visayas State University – Main Campus
Tacloban City
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20785319

Saturday Breakfast

American soldiers,
Troopers and officials,
Gathered at dawn.
In the mess tent:
Reading bulk of mails,
Sipping news from prints,
Stood unarmed with hangover.

Prisoners in sibley tents,
Unfed overnight.
In the town's plaza,
Without warning:
Church bells rang
In startling suddenness,
"Atake, Balangigan-on."

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Joseph P. Nacionales, LPT, MAELLT
Instructor
Department of Languages and Literature
School of Arts and Sciences
Eastern Visayas State University – Main Campus
Tacloban City
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20785479

My Cross-dresser Father

My father is a farmer,
Sharp bolo in his hands:
Tills the earth,
Carabao by his side,
Sometimes a fisherman,
Swam the river placing traps.

In the eve of September 27,
He wore baro, saya, and pañuelo.
He led us to take refuge in the mountains.

It was 1901.
He kept his bolo inside his saya,
Not to be seen by white men.
With fear and chaos,
We fled to the mountains,
Amidst the turmoil.

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+639543906965



Joseph P. Nacionales, LPT, MAELLT
Instructor
Department of Languages and Literature
School of Arts and Sciences
Eastern Visayas State University – Main Campus
Tacloban City
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20785592

War Booty Bells

Three bells
rang in the old church

blessing the town:
clanging, and tolling
echoing the nearby towns

church goers are fervent to pray in the church
sand bricks on the walls hear their worship

the Americans came
brought their garrison
controlled the town

the locals in forced labor
and women were molested
triggered a surprise attack
white men defeated
bells were stolen.

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lakbaydiwapublishing@gmail.com
Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965

[1]**John Christopher C. Nolial, MSc.**
[2]**Amiel Jay S. Socorro, MSc.**
[1,2]Instructor I
[1,2]University of Camarines Norte
Mercedes, Camarines Norte, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20790175

Plastic Whispers Beneath the Ocean Tide

Beneath the blue where silence sings,
where coral blooms like painted wings,
the fish once danced through silver light,
unafraid of what would bite.

But now the waves bring broken things
a bottle's ghost, a wrapper's strings,
small shattered beads we cannot see,
dust from our convenience spree.

The shellfish feed with open trust,
sifting the sea for life and dust.
Yet hidden in the ocean's meal,
are plastic grains their bodies feel.

The fish mistake them, bite by bite,
for drifting food in morning light.
They swallow fragments, sharp and small,
a man-made rain that poisons all.

And what they keep, we later take
served on our plates, from lake and wake.
The ocean's wound returns to land,
held quietly in the human hand.

For plastic climbs the food chain's stair,
from tiny shells to market fare.
Bioaccumulated, unseen,
it stains the spaces in between.

We thought the sea could hold our wrong,
could swallow waste and still stay strong.
But every tide has learned our name,
and brings back pieces of our shame.

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So, let this be the hour we wake,
not when the last blue waves break.
Refuse the needless. Choose with care.
Repair the earth we all must share.

Bring bags that last. Bring cups reused.
Let careless habits be refused.
Clean every shore. Protect each stream.
Defend the fish, the shell, the dream.

For if the ocean learns to heal,
then future hands may still reveal
a world where children, standing free,
taste life, not plastic, from the sea.

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+639543906965



Jerrick T. Parian, EdD
Instructor III
Agusan Del Sur State University - Main Campus
Bunawan, Agusan Del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20794042

Echoes of Broken Ballots

The halls of power shine beneath bright light,
Yet echoes carry endless words and spite.
The people's needs are pushed behind the show,
While louder voices steal the spotlight's glow.
A circus forms where truth is hard to know.

Instead of plans to heal the nation's pain,
Some trade insults for temporary gain.
Their quarrels fill the news from day to day,
As urgent problems slowly fade away.
The waiting people watch in deep dismay.

Corruption creeps like shadows in the night,
Concealing facts and hiding wrong from sight.
Great sums are promised with impressive pride,
Yet broken hopes are left where dreams reside.
The truth is often buried deep inside.

The roads remain unfinished in the rain,
Communities still struggle through their pain.
Hospitals and schools cry out for care,
While missing funds dissolve into the air.
The burden falls on those with least to spare.

Election season brings a hopeful song,
With speeches saying change will not take long.
The crowds believe tomorrow will be bright,
And cast their votes with faith in what is right.
They pray their choice will guide the nation's flight.

But hidden hands exchange their wealth for trust,
Reducing noble choices into dust.
When votes are bought instead of fairly won,

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The people's voice is silenced one by one.
Democracy grows weaker in the sun.

The smiles that bloom before the ballots fade,
As promises become forgotten shade.
The eager servant changes with the chair,
Replacing humble vows with little care.
Disappointment lingers everywhere.

Yet change begins with citizens who stand,
Demanding truth instead of sleight of hand.
Through knowledge, courage, vigilance, and voice,
The people hold the power of their choice.
Together they can shape a wiser course.

So, let the nation seek a brighter way,
Where deeds outweigh the words that leaders say.
With honesty and justice as the guide,
The common good shall rise with lasting pride.
And hope will walk with every future stride.

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+639543906965



Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20794558

More than Grades: Understanding the Student Within

It is common practice for students in classes everywhere to use grades as a primary gauge of their overall academic success. Grades are expected by the parents, prepared by the teachers, and dreaded by the students. One mark given to students has a way of defining a child. However, the story behind each mark is one that the numbers never tell.

Grades demonstrate performance, but they do not necessarily depict the underlying circumstances that influence a child's learning processes. Once a grade defines the students, their individual stories and challenges are easily dismissed. Take a student who frequently arrives late to class. Though it appears to be irresponsible on the student's behalf, they might be working to provide for their family, taking care of siblings, or traveling from far away to get to class. Another student might do poorly on exams, not because they are unable to perform well, but due to a lack of nourishment, a difficult family situation, or no access to learning tools. Grades give us the results, but they do not explain the underlying causes.

It is also becoming evident that achieving a high grade is being stressed as a form of student success. The majority of students are experiencing stress, anxiety, and fear due to their concern about not achieving high grades, as many feel their self-worth depends on it. While students are focused on getting high grades, they may be losing the opportunity to develop qualities like creativity, resilience, leadership skills, and social abilities. These attributes are equally important to success in a person's life.

Teachers, however, can distinguish between the successes that will appear on grading sheets and the student stories that cannot be accounted for numerically. Teachers can see which student is working the hardest in the face of extreme challenges, recognize the student who is working through personal problems and still striving, and give credit to the smallest of accomplishments that go unrewarded and unnamed but still prove to be significant personal growth. Academics are significant to understanding performance, but should not define a student's true potential. Education does not merely aim to produce good grades but to encourage young children to utilize and discover their talents, develop their potential, and prepare them for life beyond school. Each student comes with individual stories, hopes and dreams, fears, and limitations that have a far greater impact on learning than grades ever can truly demonstrate. As important as academic achievement is, we need to look behind the numbers to see the whole child.

The next time grades are issued, perhaps the more relevant question to ask should not be 'What grade did my child get,' but rather, 'What journey did my child endure to receive that grade?' Because behind each grade is a child whose story should be understood, appreciated, and valued.

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Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20796986

Beyond Teaching: Equipping Elementary Pre-Service Teachers for Learners' Mental Health

In their ideal conception of teaching and learning, elementary pre-service teachers envision their future classrooms filled with learners who are fully engaged and who learn in and of themselves. The process of preparation is, more often than not, geared towards the latter with substantial focus on curriculum, assessment, and theories of teaching. When they step out of schools of education and into practicum settings, pre-service teachers often face classrooms where their learners may be experiencing difficulties with anxiety, trauma, or emotional disengagement and realize that an optimal lesson plan will help alleviate certain elements of classroom life. Still, it is not adequate preparation for the emotional work involved in teaching.

Often, pre-service teachers lack in-depth knowledge of how to navigate and address issues of learner mental health within the classroom. A learner who is depressed will exhibit signs of apathy, and a child experiencing trauma will lash out with behaviors that have nothing to do with intention on their part; the inexperienced teacher will likely not know how to read these behaviors, which can diminish their confidence and sense of efficacy. Schools add another layer of complexity to the situation. Schools of education are under significant time constraints and are unable to offer many courses that are specifically geared towards addressing learner mental health. Topics such as emotional regulation, trauma-informed practice, and referrals to mental health supports are often given minimal, cursory coverage, with the expectation that pre-service teachers will, without the appropriate background, be able to support the emotional lives of their learners, which contributes to an expanding gap between expectation and reality.

Significant change can happen if mental health literacy is woven into the fabric of teacher education. By offering psychological first aid training, connecting pre-service teachers with counseling services in an attempt to foster collaboration, and providing regular, reflective supervision, pre-service teachers can learn how to support and identify learners in crisis, how to listen in a manner that is empowering and affirming for the learners they support, and how to provide the relevant referral support needed to connect learners with necessary services. The teacher, as per the goals of the profession, is not meant to be a mental health counselor, but is meant to be an informed and compassionate presence within a community. Even with adequate training, pre-service teachers must still learn how to attend

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to their own personal boundaries within their emotional capacity for doing the work of being a teacher. Supporting learners can be emotionally draining, and self-care needs to be built into the concept of preparation for the profession. The support provided through mental health training needs to include external resources to rely upon as well as internally driven strategies to manage one's own emotions.

Teacher education programs must be rebuilt to embrace a new definition of what makes an effective teacher. A good teacher is more than a test score provider or a classroom manager; a good teacher supports the safety and growth of the whole child and includes understanding learner mental health among their strengths. Addressing the emotional dimension of teaching requires a paradigm shift in the way we prepare teachers-it is a change in curriculum and, fundamentally, a transformation in school culture toward what could be defined as heart-work.

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+639543906965



Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20798434

Beyond Academics: Why Character Education is Essential for Students

In this fast-paced, ever-changing society, a school's performance is largely based on its academic success. A school is evaluated based on its graduation rates, standardized test scores, and academic success, but all of these only comprise half of a student's growth. The other half, character education, deals with acquiring virtues like responsibility, respect, honesty, kindness, empathy, and perseverance.

Character education has become a focal point as the problems schools are struggling with, like bullying, unruly conduct, psychological health, and the well-being of students in the community, become more prominent. Merely knowing information about a particular topic is not enough to equip young people for the real world. They also need to be grounded by values and social knowledge so that they may use their knowledge wisely. Schools can mold both a student's knowledge and social-emotional capabilities. As students and teachers interact in schools on a daily basis, they have the opportunity to practice acceptance, respect, and cooperation to reach common goals, solve problems, and contribute to the community. All of these abilities fall under the category of character education.

An advantage of character education in schools is that it fosters a better learning environment for students. They will be able to interact positively and take responsibility for their learning due to a higher level of respect among other students, which in turn would increase the performance and safety of the school, as well as an improved sense of student well-being. By creating an opportunity for students to put themselves in another's shoes, schools can significantly reduce the amount of bullying and disrespectful behavior among students. While students will continue to differ from one another, they can develop a stronger sense of camaraderie and compassion for one another.

Character education will also prepare students for life after they graduate from school and beyond, in the workplace. A person's integrity, ability to work with others to accomplish tasks, and ability to solve problems are of greater importance in a work environment than their academic capabilities. A responsible student who has been able to apply perseverance will be able to get through challenges with a stronger character, even after school has concluded. It should be the responsibility of all teachers to incorporate character education throughout the entire school day, and learning opportunities should not have to be confined

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+639543906965

to the four walls of the classroom. Parents and the community must partner with their school and teachers to encourage social skill development and responsible behavior among students.

Character education will not be forgotten in the coming years, and although education may present students with an opportunity, it is character that will allow students to do something with it. Schools can make positive impacts on the world if character and academia come into partnership.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20798830

Light

Their thirst for knowledge
Finally, a beam of light
True prosperity!

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lakbaydiwapublishing@gmail.com
Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20799267

EDUCATORS

Each day, they teach with wisdom and care
Dearly guiding, with passion so rare
Unfolding dreams
Changing lives
Amidst struggles and plights.
Tireless efforts beyond tasks
Others' success, nothing more to ask
Raising lawyers and doctors among the many professions
Shaping the future of a nation

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lakbaydiwapublishing@gmail.com
Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Myrna T. Baloc, PhD
Instructor I
BEEd Chairperson
Ifugao State University
Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20799530

Dream On

Dream
remains to be a dream
in the quiet night
where papers pile under dim light

Exhausted
but somewhere within,
a quiet fire starts to burn
and refuses to surrender

Returned
to the pages staring at her,
waiting for the first stroke of inspiration
whispering "dream on"

Sunrise
After endless nights and grinds
A witness, the non-stop burning light
Dreaming on….

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lakbaydiwapublishing@gmail.com
Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Joemar N. Pihnuton, EdD
Program Chair- BSEd, College of Education
Ifugao State University, Lamut Campus
Lamut, Ifugao, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20810982

Social Studies: Is it Bane or Boon?

In many classrooms, the subject of Social Studies is perceived as a field full of dates, names, and historical events to be memorized by students. While some learners see it as a challenging subject and some as a field that is somewhat obsolete in the age of STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), I cannot help but wonder whether Social Studies is a boon or a bane.

The answer to this question is relative to the extent to which one considers social Studies to be an art of remembering facts and historical data and political ideologies, or it's what learners understand it to be. As a matter of fact, Social Studies is more of a burden to students if they perceive it as a subject where memorization takes up the whole school hour. Students might not be able to connect what they learn in school to their everyday lives and thus view the subject as trivial and of no use.

However, if properly and consciously dealt with in the classroom, Social Studies is certainly a boon to the society we live in. It guides learners toward the society they belong to, their histories, their duties, and responsibilities as citizens. In this field, students are molded to be critical thinkers as they are made to study history, geography, economics, culture, and government; skills they will be able to use when making informed decisions and problem-solving in any context.

In today's era of readily accessible information (some factual, some misleading) and of recurring social issues, the need for students to take Social Studies seriously is ever-present. This course provides students with information on how to examine a claim critically, distinguish fact from opinion, respect others' opinions, and respond in an appropriate manner. This information is indispensable for any functioning society or community. For rich cultural backgrounds, like those found in the Cordillera region, Social Studies courses help young generations to value indigenous knowledge and traditions of their forebears and understand their role in an increasingly globally-oriented society. In Social Studies, students also learn empathy and social responsibility. When the curriculum makes learners focus on social issues like poverty, inequality, climate change, or preservation of cultures, they are able to find their place not only in the present but in history as well, and know how to make their society a better place to live in.

If considered as more than just dates and names but as a tool for comprehending society and learning about oneself and others, then Social Studies is definitely a boon and one of the most important courses to include in a learner's education in order to produce responsible and informed citizens. The world we live in is one of the fastest-changing worlds, so it is vital to study and understand people, culture, institutions, and histories as much as we can.

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Program Chair- BSEd, College of Education
Ifugao State University, Lamut Campus
Lamut, Ifugao, Philippines
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The Pains and Gains of Being a Social Studies Teacher

Teaching Social Studies goes beyond delivering facts about history, geography, government, and culture. It is a commitment to develop learned and informed citizens. A Social Studies teacher goes through pains and gains in the profession. While it can be challenging, its rewards make up for all challenges. One of the most rewarding but also painful moments of teaching Social Studies is addressing students' apathy and lack of concern about social issues. Initially, learners perceive the subject as a collection of dates and people to be remembered. It takes creativity and consistency to let them see the importance of social studies in their daily lives. Discussion of controversial issues, such as poverty and the environment, is painful since they need to consider different people in all walks of life.

Challenges in keeping the subject relevant are inevitable. Social Studies has strong connections with present social and political affairs, and as teachers, we need to update ourselves so that we can deliver factual information. The heavy load in lesson planning, implementation, and community involvement can at times be overwhelming, but these are responsibilities of every teacher in preparing students to become responsible citizens.

In indigenous communities, such as in Ifugao and Cordilleras, a Social Studies teacher's duty goes beyond educating students to preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of our people. In fact, with the rapid changes brought by modernization and globalization affecting younger Ifugaos, the role of Social Studies teachers in nurturing love for the culture, language, and traditions will be greater.

However, the pains of being a Social Studies teacher fade with every rewarding moment when students realize the importance of the subject to their own lives. Seeing students apply what they learned in their own lives provides teachers with immense gratification. The intellectual stimulation derived from the preparations is truly rewarding. Students' progress in critical thinking, discussion, participation, and realization of their role in society is what really motivates a teacher and makes him/her continue with the challenging profession.

One of the most satisfying gains of being a Social Studies teacher is helping students realize the importance of their identity and belonging to their community. In Ifugao, learning about the unique geography, their cultural significance, and other practices and beliefs, fosters pride in learners about the past of their ancestors and the need to preserve it. Every moment when a student feels a sense of belonging and commitment to their community, a teacher's

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mission to inculcate appreciation for their own identity and culture among them is being achieved.

The pains and gains of teaching Social Studies cannot be separated; the pains tested the teacher's dedication while the gains confirmed the teacher's noble purpose in developing informed citizens. Considering the dynamic, complex, socio-cultural, and environmental challenges today, Social Studies teachers' role in producing responsible and well-informed citizens is invaluable. Thus, the challenges, though many, can always be overcome with enthusiasm and with faith that one's purpose will never be wasted.

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Joemar N. Pihnuton, EdD
Program Chair- BSEd, College of Education
Ifugao State University, Lamut Campus
Lamut, Ifugao, Philippines
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Whispers of the Originals

Along the Cordillera mountains,
Where clouds conceal emerald heights,
The terraces rise like old stairways,
Tales held through many a night.
The stones recollect every step,
Of wise and mighty sires;
Who shaped the mountains with slow hands,
Under the sun and in the highland sky.

In the valleys the hudhud calls out,
Its melodies floated on the wind;
Stories of bravery and kinship
Of where our folk always have been.
The forests sigh through the muyong,
The rivers sing their song of old,
Lessons of care and balance taught,
Which have led the people all the way.

But change comes on the mountains,
As the day changes with roads and screens,
Many youngsters leave the playgrounds of their fathers
And old traditions fade away slow.
But the rice terraces still stand,
Their beauty is written on every hill;
A living monument of a race
Whose heart is stout and true.

Silence is not the language of the ancestors,
But under the earth beneath our feet;
In each harvest, chant, assembly,
Our future responds to their wisdom.
More than a responsibility to save these mountains,
It's to honor who we've been;
To keep alive the language and the stories;
Passed down like the light of a far-off star.

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Let us then listen to their whispers,
Out of our highland's morning mist;
So long as the terraces are there
The spirit of Ifugao lives on.
And when future generations walk
Free and high, among the mountains,
May they hear the voices of their forebears
In every stone and tree and rice terrace they see

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[1,2]Instructor I
[1,2]University of Camarines Norte
Mercedes, Camarines Norte, Philippines
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Redclaw Crayfish: Alaga o Banta?

Sa bukid, si Rosalie ay naglatag ng ligtas na kulungan;
Redclaw ang alaga niya, dayo sa ating katubigan.
Nakita niya pulang marka sa sipit ng kalalakihan;
Akala niya'y kita lamang, biyaya sa sambayanan.

Ngunit dumating naman si Lira, opisyal sa pangisdaan;
Dala niya ang tala, batas, babala sa sambayanan.
Ang redclaw ay *Cherax quadricarinatus* sa katubigan;
Kapag ito'y nakawala, ilog natin maguguluhan.

May bigat at laki, kayang mabuhay nang mas matagalan;
Sa tubig na mainit, mas mabilis silang dumami naman.
Kapag walang harang, papasok sa sapa pati palayan;
Makikipag-agawan sila sa tirahan at pagkainan.

Bababa ang halaman, lalabo pa rin ang katubigan;
Munting hayop sa putik ay unti-unting mababawasan.
Isda at iba pang buhay rin ay maaagawan sa tahanan;
Kaya ang pag-aalaga nito ay hindi laro't libangan.

Tinuruan si Rosalie ni Lira ng tunay na kaligtasan;
May takip ang tangke, salaan sa bawat butas at lagusan.
May tala ng tubig, init, alat, dumi, wastong kalinawan;
May tubig na malinis, sa lugar na hindi binabahaan.

Huwag sa ilog, lawa, o sa bukas na palaisdaan saanman;
Huwag din sa hukay-lupa kung may lusot na matakasan.
Huwag ihalo sa hipon at alimango sa kulungan;
At huwag pakawalan kahit marami na sa kulungan.

Kung bibili ng semilya, galing sa sertipikadong punlaan;
Kung ililipat, kailangan ang permiso sa bawat daanan.
Kung aangkat, kailangan papeles pangkalusugan sa daungan;
Kung may sakit, iulat rin agad sa kinauukulang tanggapan.

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Natakot si Rosalie sa multa at pagkakulong naman;
May danyos sa ilog, may gastos sa pagpuksa at ayusan.
Kung pabaya siya, sakahan niya'y mapapasara man;
At ang pangalan niya'y mababahiran sa sambayanan.

Kaya nagpasuri si Rosalie sa tanggapan ng pangisdaan;
Nagpatayo siya ng harang, makinis sa bawat hangganan.
Nagtakda siya ng tamang bilang, pagkain, at araw ng bantayan;
Nag-aral siya ng batas bago pa dagdagan ang kulungan.

Nang bumuhos ang ulan, bantay niya'y gising sa bakuran;
Tiningnan niya ang buong salaan, pader, takip, at bakuran.
Walang redclaw ang tumakas, ligtas ang ilog at palayan;
Ngumiti si Lira: iyan ang tunay na pangangalagaan.

Ngayon si Rosalie'y kuwento sa bawat pagtitipunan;
Hindi lang takot sa batas, mahal niya ang kalikasan.
Si Rosalie ang salamin ng magsasakang puno ng kaalaman;
Crayfish farmer na tunay, may malasakit, pananagutan.

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Mula Balat Hanggang Palikpik

Sa bukid ni Aldrino, may balat sa harapan,
Dilaw na kalabasa, itinabi sa bilaohan,
Akala ng iba'y wala nang kapupuntahan,
Ngunit may lihim itong naghihintay sa lansangan.

Pinulot ni Aldrino sa tahimik na pamilihan,
Hinugasan, pinatuyo sa sikat ng kaparangan,
Giniling hanggang pino, parang gintong alay-kanan,
Mula sa dating tapon, naging pulbos na kay-inam.

Sa tangke ng pag-aaral, tubig ay binantayan,
May hangin, may sukat, may oras ng pakainan,
Doon lumangoy ang African catfish na masinop ang galawan,
Clarias gariepinus, sa agham ay pinangalanan.

Hindi ito kuwentong basta isdang galing saan,
Ito'y uri ng isdang may sariling katangian,
Matatag sa kulungan, mabilis sa paglaki't timbang,
Kaya't hinanap sa balat ang bagong kabuluhan.

May sero, may dalawa, may lima, may sampuan,
Timplang sinubukan sa araw ng pakainang,
Sa limang bahagdan, may magandang pahiwatig na tangan,
Mas ayos ang paggastos ng pakain sa katawan.

Sa dumi ng tubig, dumating ang pagsusulitang,
Amonya ang humamon sa tahimik na palaisdaan,
Ngunit walang lumubog sa bigat ng pangambahan,
Ligtas ang pangkat, matatag ang kapalaran.

Pagkaraan, si Aldrino'y tumingin sa kabilang tangkehan,
Naroon ang iBEST tilapia, may sariling paglalakbayang,
Sa limang bahagdan, bigat nila'y umangat sa timbangan,
Parang butil ng pag-asa sa palad ng kabuhayan.

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Ngunit sa dalawang bahagdan, ibang kuwento ang nasilayan,
Mas maraming natira, mas matibay ang bilang,
Sa kita at balik-puhunan, iyon ang nangibabaw sa talaan,
Paalalang ang tubo'y hindi laging sa bigat lamang.

Nakangiti si Aldrino sa gilid ng palaisdaan,
Hawak ang pulbos mula sa balat na minsang iniwan,
"Hindi basura," wika niya, "kung may isip na gagabay riyan,"
"Ang tira ng lupa'y puwedeng maging biyaya sa lamán."

Kaya sa bawat kalabasa sa kusina at bukiran,
May aral na humihinga sa dilaw nitong kasuotan,
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Sa African catfish, nakita ang ligtas na daanan,
Sa iBEST, nakita ang balanse ng gastos at pakinabangang,
Sa kamay ni Aldrino, balat ay naging katwiran,
Na ang sustansiya'y minsan nasa bagay na nililimutan.

Kaya huwag maliitin ang balat sa gilid ng hapag-kainan,
Baka roon nakatago ang susi ng palaisdaan,
Sa tamang timpla, sukat, tiyaga, at kaalamang,
Ang mumunting tira'y nagiging ani ng kalikasan.

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[2]**Amiel Jay S. Socorro, MSc.**
[1,2]Instructor I
[1,2]University of Camarines Norte
Mercedes, Camarines Norte, Philippines
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The Fisherman and the Mangrove's Gift

A fisherman lived beside the sea,
Certain that mangroves held no mystery.
"They are only trees," he would often say,
As he cut them down day after day.

He never saw what they sheltered below,
The young fish and crabs that needed them to grow.
Nor did he notice the bees overhead,
Building sweet honeycombs where their young were fed.

The mangroves stood silent through sun and rain,
Giving life to the coast again and again.
They nourished the waters and guarded the shore,
Yet the fisherman kept wanting more.

Years passed by, and the forests grew thin,
Still, he ignored the warning within.
He took from nature more than his share,
Believing its riches would always be there.

Then one dark night, the sky turned wild,
The sea roared fiercely, untamed and riled.
A mighty typhoon and tsunami came,
Leaving destruction in nature's name.

Homes were shattered and boats were torn,
Families grieved by the break of dawn.
The raging waters swallowed the land,
Far beyond what anyone had planned.

The fisherman struggled against the tide,
With nowhere left to run or hide.
Exhausted and helpless, he fought for breath,
Drifting alone in the face of death.

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Just when hope began to fade away,
A floating mangrove log came his way.
He clung to it through the stormy night,
Holding on with all his might.

When morning came, he reached the shore,
But his village was there no more.
Silence lingered where laughter had been,
And sorrow covered the broken scene.

He fell to his knees and bowed his head,
Thinking of all the lost and dead.
Then the truth struck deep within his soul,
Like a wave that finally made him whole.

The mangroves he cut had been a shield,
Protecting homes, boats, and every field.
They sheltered life both great and small,
Standing as guardians over all.

The tree he once thought had little worth,
Had become his lifeline upon the earth.
The gift he wasted through careless years,
Now opened his eyes through grief and tears.

From that day on, he changed his way,
Planting mangroves along the bay.
He taught the young and inspired the old,
That nature is worth far more than gold.

Now people know him near and far,
As a leader guided by nature's star.
For he learned a lesson both deep and true:
Protect the mangroves, and they will protect you.

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[1,2]Instructor I
[1,2]University of Camarines Norte
Mercedes, Camarines Norte, Philippines
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Payao at Pahinga: Ang Tatlong Buwang Katahimikan ng Dagat

Sa dagat ng Gensan, ginto ang alon.
Bariles at dilaw na palikpik, buhay ng taon.
Moro Gulf, Celebes, Sulu saksi ng paglalayag,
kung saan ang dagat ay hindi nauubos sa pangarap.

Sa malalayong laot, sa hangganan ng bansa,
tuna'y hinahagilap ng bangkang umaasa.
Sa internasyonal na dagat na walang pahinga,
patakarang ihip ang gumagabay sa pangingisda.

Sa "tuna highway," barko'y rumaragasa,
bitbit ang pag-asa sa bawat pagbalik sa pabrika.
Doon isinisilang ang lata ng pang-araw,
katas ng laot na naging pagkain ng tao.

Ngunit dumating ang katahimikan ng tatlong buwan.
Parang dagat na biglang pinatigil ang sigaw ng kabuhayan.
Payao'y ipinagbawal—hindi man sa pangalan ng laot,
kundi sa sistemang hindi ramdam ang lamig
ng gutom sa bangin ng bangon.

At biglang tumigil ang mundo ng makina.
Mga conveyor na dati'y buhay, ngayo'y tahimik na tila multo ng pabrika.
Mga kamay na sanay sa bilis ng trabaho,
ngayo'y nakatungo sa bulsang walang laman ng pangako.

Hindi lang isda ang nawala sa laot na ito
kundi hapag, pangarap, at bukas ng mga anak na nagugutom.
Walang sahod. Walang trabaho. Walang salita.
Tanging katahimikan ng tiyan ang sumasagot sa kanila.

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+639543906965

Sino ang makikinig sa laylayan ng dagat?
Kung ang desisyon ay nasa malayong mesa ng hindi
nakakakita ng pawis sa balat?
Taon-taon itong bumabalik na sugat,
pero bakit parang walang lunas ang dagat na dapat
ay buhay at sapat?

Hindi ito simpleng industriya, ito ay buhay.
Bawat lata ng tuna, may pamilyang kumakapit sa gabi.

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Kung hihinto ang dagat, sino ang sasalo sa gutom?
O patuloy na lang bang tatahimik ang sistemang dapat ay tumutugon?
Kaya ayusin ang patakaran, dinggin ang mangingisda.
Huwag iwan sa hangin ang obrerong umaasa.
Maglatag ng alternatibo sa panahong walang huli,
huwag hayaang ang gutom ay maging normal na suli.
Dagat ay yaman—oo. Ngunit tao ang dahilan.
Kung wala ang manggagawa, wala ring kinabukasan.
Kaya ito ang sigaw—hindi bulong, hindi hinaing—
kabuhayan ng laylayan, huwag hayaang mamatay sa tahimik na hangin

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20822578

Beyond the Seat Toward Meaningful Inclusion in Education

In halls where learning's promise grows,
Beneath the weight of plans and prose,
A question lingers at the gate:
Can inclusion flourish, not just state?
For every child, in every place,
Deserves to learn with equal grace;
To find a path where dreams belong,
And knowledge turns their voice to song.

Teachers know and leaders see
The value of diversity.
They honor minds both near and far,
And recognize each learner's star.
Yet understanding, though profound,
Must take root in common ground;
For visions written, clear and neat,
Must live beyond the classroom seat.

A seat alone cannot ensure
The kind of welcome that will endure.
What worth has access to a room
If unseen barriers still consume?
A door may open, wide and free,
Yet still deny true equity.
Belonging asks for something more:
A chance to thrive, not just explore.

The walls reveal a silent tale
Of pathways built or bound to fail.
A ramp unmade, a tool denied,
Can leave a learner pushed aside.
The burden rests not on the child,
But systems slow and reconciled.

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Exclusion often starts to grow
Where care and access fail to flow.

Yet hope survives in daily care,
In teachers shaping learning fair.
Through varied methods, thoughtfully planned,
They guide each learner's heart and hand.
They adapt lessons, shift the way,
So every child can join the day.
Their work reflects inclusion's art:
A practice born from mind and heart.

Six pillars hold the vision high:
Support that helps each learner fly;
Spaces where belonging stays,
Communities that lift and raise;
Strategies responsive and wise,
Cultures where respect applies;
Assessment seeing growth unfold,
And progress valued more than gold.

Inclusion reaches past the wall,
Beyond the classroom's measured hall.
It joins the home, the street, the town,
Where shared responsibilities abound.
It calls for partners, near and wide,
To stand with learners side by side;
For lasting change is rarely won
By schools attempting it alone.

The mountains teach a simple truth:
Inclusion is the work of growth.
Progress lives, yet much remains,
Demanding vision, will, and gains.
A seat may open learning's door,
Yet justice asks for something more:
To honor every human whole,
And nurture every mind and soul.

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20822792

The Teacher and the Machine When Human Wisdom Meets Artificial Intelligence

In classrooms touched by the morning sun,
Where dreams awaken and journeys begin,
A silent presence enters the learning space,
Carrying the promise of a changing age.

A creation of circuits, language, and light,
A companion emerging in humanity's sight.
It listens, responds, creates, and explains,
A digital mind built from patterns and names.

It offers knowledge at the learner's call,
A guiding voice available to all.
For the hesitant child who struggles to speak,
It becomes a bridge for the answers they seek.

It inspires creation, it nurtures design,
It opens new pathways where ideas shine.
It helps learners explore, imagine, and grow,
Revealing possibilities they once did not know.

Yet in the presence of this remarkable creation,
Teachers confront a profound transformation.
They stand between promise and uncertainty,
Guardians of wisdom, humanity, and integrity.

For machines may generate language and thought,
And offer solutions instantly sought,
But they cannot understand a student's silent plea,
Or recognize the dreams that only teachers see.

They cannot replace the warmth of a guiding hand,
The encouragement to rise and withstand.

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They cannot offer compassion born from experience,
Or teach through patience, kindness, and presence.

For education is more than information shared;
It is a relationship built through trust and care.
It is the courage to question, the strength to explore,
The human connection that opens every door.

Yet new challenges emerge beneath technology's glow,
As educators navigate a world they must know.
Questions of honesty, originality, and truth arise,
As artificial voices fill digital skies.

When answers appear without struggle or search,
Will curiosity weaken? Will learning lose its worth?
Will minds continue to wonder, create, and dream,
Or surrender their thinking to a digital stream?

The teacher now walks an unfamiliar road,
Carrying new responsibilities and a heavier load.
Learning new systems, examining what they reveal,
Determining what is accurate, ethical, and real.

They question the data, the patterns, the design,
Searching for fairness in every line.
They guide students to look beyond what appears,
Teaching wisdom that grows through thoughtful years.

They reshape lessons, redefine assessment,
Seeking deeper forms of student engagement.
Not merely answers that machines can provide,
But understanding developed from within and inside.

For true learning is not a completed page,
But a lifelong journey through every age.
It grows through curiosity, struggle, and discovery,
Through reflection, imagination, and human inquiry.

Yet teachers cannot carry this future alone;
They need support, resources, and foundations strongly grown.
They need time to learn, opportunities to explore,
And institutions that help them open new doors.

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Schools must build pathways where technology serves,
Where innovation follows the values it preserves.
Where every learner, regardless of place,
Can access the future with fairness and grace.

Artificial intelligence should not replace the teacher's role,
Nor diminish the human spirit that makes learning whole.
It should become a partner, a tool, a guide,
Supporting human wisdom rather than standing beside.

For the future of education will not belong
To machines alone or algorithms strong.
It will belong to those who understand
The power of knowledge shaped by a human hand.

So let technology rise with purpose and care,
While human compassion remains everywhere.
For the greatest lessons humanity can impart
Are written not in machines, but within the heart.

And when tomorrow's classrooms unfold beneath new skies,
Where digital horizons and human dreams arise,
May teachers remain the enduring flame,
The soul and spirit behind learning's name.

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+639543906965



Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20825416

Unlocking Literacy Through Poetic Inquiry into Reading Difficulties and Educational Support

In silent rows where learners sit and dream,
A quiet struggle flows beneath the stream;
While pages turn with confidence and grace,
Some children search for meaning, place by place.

Reading, the gateway to the world of thought,
Is not a skill that every child is taught
With equal ease; for some, the path is steep,
Where sounds and symbols secrets closely keep.

The science speaks: five pillars stand in view
Decoding, fluency, comprehension too;
Vocabulary's breadth and motivation's flame,
Together shape literacy's noble aim.

Decoding first, where letters meet with sound,
A foundational bridge on learning's ground;
Yet when phonemic pathways fail to grow,
The written word becomes a distant glow.

For some, dyslexia weaves a complex thread,
A neurobiological path to tread;
Not lack of intellect nor will to strive,
But different routes through which the mind arrives.

And though a learner reads each word with care,
Comprehension's deeper meaning may not be there;
For knowledge, language, focus, and context blend
To help the reader understand and comprehend.

Fluency follows with its measured pace,
Where rhythm, accuracy, and meaning embrace;

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Yet hesitant voices, burdened by delay,
May lose the joy that reading lights each day.

Vocabulary grows like branches from a tree,
Expanding thought and possibility;
Each new-found word unlocks another door,
Revealing worlds unseen and so much more.

Beyond cognition lies the human heart,
Where confidence and motivation start;
For those who doubt their ability to read,
Reluctance often grows from unmet need.

Yet research offers pathways bright and clear,
Grounded in evidence, refined through years;
Systematic phonics, structured literacy's art,
Build stronger skills and strengthen every start.

Repeated reading helps the hesitant voice,
Paired learning grants encouragement and choice;
While questioning, predicting, and review
Teach learners what thoughtful readers do.

Through direct instruction, language starts to bloom,
Dispelling uncertainty and academic gloom;
Context clues and word analysis guide the way,
Transforming challenges into gains each day.

Supportive classrooms cultivate belief,
Providing opportunities and relief;
Where goals are reachable and efforts recognized,
The seeds of lifelong literacy are realized.

For learners facing greater barriers still,
Assistive tools extend opportunity and skill;
Audiobooks and speech technologies lend light,
Helping readers navigate the text in sight.

And families, partners in the learning quest,
Through shared stories and encouragement, do their best;
Together with educators, hand in hand,
They strengthen literacy across the land.

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The message echoes through both fact and lore:
Reading difficulties need not define the score;
With early care, informed instruction, and support anew,
Struggling readers can become successful too.

For every book unlocked, a future starts to rise,
A world of knowledge opening before young eyes;
And every child who learns to read with confidence and pride
Carries the power of literacy as a lifelong guide.

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20825746

When Reading Becomes a Struggle: Why Every Child Deserves a Chance to Succeed

In every classroom, there is a child who quietly struggles to read. While classmates confidently turn pages and answer questions, some learners labor over simple words, hesitate when asked to read aloud, or lose interest in books altogether. These challenges are often hidden behind silence, embarrassment, or avoidance. Yet, for many children, learning to read is not as effortless as we might assume.

A growing body of research reveals that reading difficulties are among the most significant barriers to academic success. Reading is not merely a subject in school; it is the gateway to learning across all disciplines. When children struggle to read, they often struggle to learn. The consequences can extend far beyond the classroom, affecting confidence, motivation, and future opportunities.

Recent findings from a systematic review of literature that we have conducted highlight five major areas where learners commonly encounter difficulties: decoding, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and motivation. Decoding refers to the ability to connect letters and sounds to recognize words. For beginning readers, this foundational skill can be challenging, especially when phonological awareness is weak or early literacy experiences are limited. Some learners also face neurobiological conditions such as dyslexia, which make reading acquisition even more difficult.

However, recognizing words correctly does not automatically guarantee understanding. Many learners can read text aloud but struggle to comprehend its meaning. Limited vocabulary, inadequate background knowledge, and difficulty maintaining attention often hinder comprehension. Research has shown that many students skip unfamiliar words or lose focus while reading, making it difficult for them to construct meaning from what they read.

Reading fluency presents another challenge. Learners who read slowly, pause frequently, or struggle with pronunciation often expend so much effort decoding words that little cognitive energy remains for understanding the text. Furthermore, anxiety associated with reading aloud can discourage participation and weaken confidence.

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Vocabulary development is equally critical. A limited vocabulary restricts a learner's ability to understand texts, infer meanings, and connect ideas. This challenge is particularly evident among learners who have limited language exposure or are learning in a language different from their mother tongue.

Beyond cognitive skills lies an equally important factor: motivation. Children who lack confidence or interest in reading are less likely to practice regularly. Unfortunately, reduced reading practice leads to slower skill development, creating a cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to break.

The good news is that research consistently demonstrates that these challenges can be addressed through effective teaching practices. Teachers remain at the forefront of literacy development, and evidence strongly supports the use of explicit, systematic, and structured reading instruction.

For learners struggling with decoding, systematic phonics instruction has been shown to improve word recognition and spelling significantly. Through carefully sequenced lessons and guided practice, children learn how sounds and letters work together to form words. Structured literacy approaches, especially those incorporating multisensory activities, further strengthen these skills.

To improve fluency, teachers use repeated reading, paired reading, and performance-based activities such as Reader's Theater. These approaches help learners develop automaticity, expression, and confidence while reading.

Comprehension can be strengthened through explicit strategy instruction. Effective teachers guide learners to ask questions, summarize ideas, make predictions, and monitor their understanding. Graphic organizers and instruction on text structures also help learners process information more effectively.

Vocabulary growth is best supported through a combination of direct instruction and extensive reading. Teaching learners how to use context clues and understand word parts empowers them to become independent word learners.

Equally important is creating a classroom culture that nurtures motivation. When learners are given choices in reading materials, encouraged to set achievable goals, and supported in a positive learning environment, their engagement and confidence improve significantly.

For learners with dyslexia and severe reading difficulties, specialized interventions are essential. Structured literacy approaches, assistive technologies, audiobooks, and text-to-speech tools can provide valuable support while foundational skills are being developed.

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Yet the responsibility for literacy development should not rest solely on teachers. Parents play a vital role by reading with their children, providing access to books, and maintaining regular communication with teachers. When schools and families work together, learners receive the consistent support they need to succeed.

The message from research is clear: reading difficulties are neither simple nor uncommon, but they are not insurmountable. Early identification, evidence-based instruction, parental involvement, and sustained support can transform struggling readers into confident learners.

As educators, parents, policymakers, and community members, we must remember that every child deserves the opportunity to unlock the world that reading opens. Literacy is more than a school skill; it is a lifelong tool for learning, participation, and empowerment. Investing in reading today is investing in the future of every child.

The next time we encounter a struggling reader, let us not see a child who cannot read. Instead, let us see a child who has not yet received the support needed to thrive, and let us commit ourselves to providing it.

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20826404

Educators in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Navigating Opportunity, Responsibility, and Change

Artificial intelligence has moved from the realm of science fiction into the everyday realities of education. Today, teachers and students encounter AI in classrooms, online learning platforms, and digital tools that can generate essays, solve problems, create images, and even simulate conversation. What once seemed futuristic has become ordinary, prompting educators to reconsider long-held assumptions about teaching, learning, and assessment.

The arrival of AI has sparked both excitement and anxiety. Some celebrate it as a breakthrough capable of expanding access to knowledge and personalizing learning. Others fear it may erode critical thinking, creativity, and academic integrity. Both perspectives contain elements of truth. AI is neither a miracle solution nor an existential threat. Rather, it is a powerful tool whose impact depends on how thoughtfully it is used.

For educators, the challenge is not simply learning how to operate new technologies. It is understanding how these technologies fit within the deeper purposes of education. Many teachers recognize AI's potential but also admit feeling unprepared for its rapid evolution. New applications emerge almost daily, often faster than schools and universities can adapt. As a result, educators find themselves in an unusual position: teaching in a landscape that is changing even as they are learning to navigate it.

This reality calls for more than technical proficiency. Teachers need what might be called critical AI literacy, the ability to understand not only how AI works but also its limitations, biases, and ethical implications. Educators must learn to question AI-generated information, recognize when technology may reinforce existing inequalities, and consider how data privacy and surveillance affect students. In many ways, the challenge posed by AI is as much ethical and pedagogical as it is technological.

Among the concerns most frequently raised is the effect of generative AI on academic integrity. Tools capable of producing polished essays, reports, and problem solutions have disrupted traditional forms of assessment. Assignments once used to measure learning can now be completed with significant AI assistance, making it increasingly difficult to determine what students genuinely know and understand.

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Yet the issue goes beyond plagiarism. A more fundamental question confronts educators: What happens when students begin outsourcing thinking itself? Learning requires struggle, reflection, and intellectual effort. Reading complex texts, analyzing ideas, and solving difficult problems are not obstacles to learning; they are the learning process. When AI becomes a substitute for these activities rather than a support for them, students risk engaging with knowledge only at a superficial level. Consequently, educators are being challenged to rethink not only assessment practices but also how meaningful learning is cultivated.

At the same time, AI has reminded many educators of something essential: teaching is deeply human work. Education has never been solely about delivering information. At its best, it is built on relationships, on encouragement, mentorship, empathy, and trust. A teacher often influences students not simply through expertise but through presence, compassion, and belief in their potential.

AI can generate explanations and provide feedback, but it cannot genuinely understand a student's fears, aspirations, or personal circumstances. It cannot replace the encouragement offered by a mentor, the inspiration sparked by a meaningful conversation, or the sense of belonging fostered within a learning community. As technology becomes more prominent in education, preserving these human dimensions becomes even more important.

The ethical questions surrounding AI further underscore the need for caution. AI systems learn from vast collections of human-created data, which inevitably contain biases, inaccuracies, and historical inequities. Consequently, AI-generated content can sometimes reinforce stereotypes, reproduce misinformation, or present incomplete perspectives. Concerns about privacy and the collection of student data also continue to grow. Educators are therefore increasingly expected to serve as ethical guides, helping students evaluate the reliability and fairness of AI-generated information.

Despite these challenges, educators have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability. Across schools and universities, teachers are actively seeking opportunities to strengthen their understanding of AI through professional development, collaborative learning communities, and independent study. Rather than rejecting technology, many are working to integrate it thoughtfully and responsibly.

This adaptability is especially evident in the growing movement toward authentic assessment. Oral presentations, portfolios, reflective journals, collaborative projects, and process-based evaluations are gaining renewed importance because they reveal how students think, create, and apply knowledge. In many respects, AI has accelerated conversations about assessment reform that educators have been pursuing for years.

Increasingly, teachers are also helping students develop responsible habits of AI use. The goal is not to prohibit technology but to encourage transparency, critical thinking, and

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intellectual independence. Students must learn not only how to use AI effectively but also when to question it, challenge it, and move beyond it.

However, educators cannot shoulder these responsibilities alone. Meaningful AI integration requires institutional support, clear ethical guidelines, ongoing professional development, and equitable access to technological resources. Without such support, the promise of AI may remain unevenly distributed, benefiting already advantaged communities while deepening existing educational inequalities.

In the end, the future of AI in education will be shaped not by machines but by people. The central question is not whether AI can teach, but how educators can use it to enrich learning while preserving the values that give education its meaning. As information becomes increasingly abundant and accessible, the role of the teacher becomes even more significant. Educators are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they are mentors, guides, ethical stewards, and architects of learning experiences that help students make sense of an increasingly complex world.

Artificial intelligence may transform education, but it is unlikely to replace the human qualities at its heart. The enduring task of educators is to ensure that, amid rapid technological change, human curiosity, creativity, empathy, and wisdom remain the foundation of learning.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20829276

Beyond the Applause

Each year the spotlight brightly gleams,
On teachers who fulfill their dreams.
With plaques and praises held up high,
Their names are echoed to the sky.

Yet when the cheers begin to fade,
And silent halls replace the parade,
What keeps their passion burning bright,
And guides their steps through every night?

It is the heart that seeks to learn,
A steady flame that will not turn.
Through graduate studies, research, and more,
They open yet another door.

For teaching is not merely a task,
Nor a role defined by what awards may ask.
It is a calling deeply known,
A seed of purpose carefully sown.

With humble hearts and grateful minds,
They leave no struggling child behind.
Their honesty and hope inspire,
And lift young dreams a little higher.

They document each gain and fall,
Reflecting deeply through it all.
For every lesson, every plan,
Helps shape a better, wiser hand.

They do not journey on their own,
Nor work in classrooms all alone.
With parents, leaders, friends, and peers,
They build strong bridges through the years.

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+639543906965

Yet even heroes face their test,
Heavy workloads and little rest.
Limited resources, pressures too,
Can challenge all they strive to do.

And so the truth becomes quite clear:
Excellence grows when support is near.
Schools must nurture, guide, and care,
Creating spaces strong and fair.

Like a house built firm and tall,
Each pillar matters, one and all.
Growth, support, and partnership blend,
To help great teachers still ascend.

So let us look beyond the prize,
Beyond the applause and admiring eyes.
For the greatest honor we can give
Is helping dedicated teachers thrive and live.

Behind each learner's success each day,
A teacher quietly lights the way.
Still growing, serving, reaching new heights
A beacon of hope, a guiding light.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20829478

When Classrooms Closed, Teachers Opened Doors

The world grew still, the hallways bare,
An unseen storm was everywhere.
The classroom doors were closed one day,
Yet learning somehow found its way.

No ringing bells, no desks in rows,
No bustling crowds the schoolyard knows.
Instead, through screens and modules worn,
A different kind of school was born.

Teachers stood where fear had spread,
With questions filling every head.
How could they teach from far away?
How could they guide from day to day?

The internet would fade and fall,
Resources scarce for one and all.
Yet still they worked beyond the night,
Determined to keep learning bright.

They learned new tools they'd never known,
Turned kitchen tables into zones
Of planning, teaching, checking work,
While carrying burdens that did lurk.

With patience strong and hearts so wide,
They stood with every child beside.
Though miles apart, they found a way
To make their presence felt each day.

The crisis taught a truth profound:
That learning's strength is not just found
In buildings made of steel and stone,
But in the people who guide and hone.

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Technology became a bridge,
Connecting homes from ridge to ridge.
And teachers once unsure of change
Became innovators through the strange.

They learned to bend but never break,
To redesign for learning's sake.
To meet each challenge face to face,
And find solutions with courage and grace.

Yet hidden behind each smiling face
Were weary hearts in a relentless race.
Long hours, stress, and endless care
Became the burdens they would bear.

The pandemic showed what many knew
That teachers need support, too.
For those who shape the minds of youth
Deserve compassion, care, and truth.

It also revealed a deeper divide,
Where opportunities could not abide.
Some learners lacked the means to start,
Yet teachers reached them with all their heart.

And through it all, one lesson grew,
A lesson lasting, strong, and true:
Resilience is not merely to survive,
But to help others continue to thrive.

Today the classrooms stand once more,
With eager footsteps at the door.
Yet echoes of those difficult years
Still carry wisdom through our ears.

The story is no longer one of pain,
But of transformation born from strain.
Of teachers who, when tested most,
Became the nation's steadfast host.

So let us honor what they showed,
Along that challenging, uncertain road.
For when teachers are valued, empowered, and free,
Education grows in strength and dignity.

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The pandemic has passed, yet its lessons stay,
Guiding our schools in a brighter way.
And among those lessons, shining through,
Is the enduring spirit of teachers true.

For when classrooms closed across the land,
Teachers opened doors with heart and hand.
And in their resilience, we can see
The future of education's possibility.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20832879

The Numbers Matters

In halls where numbers often reign,
And ratings measure loss or gain,
There walks a teacher, calm and true,
Whose worth exceeds what scores can do.

Forms are filled and targets met,
Achievements marked, objectives set.
Yet deeper than the grades assigned
Lives the passion of the teaching mind.

For what compels a teacher's heart
To give each day a selfless part?
What fuels the flame that does not tire,
And keeps alive the inner fire?

It is not always praise or fame,
Nor ribbons tied beside a name.
Not every effort seeks applause,
Nor every dream requires a cause.

Many strive to learn and grow,
To deepen all they seek to know.
They chase not titles, wealth, or gain,
But wisdom earned through joy and strain.

With every lesson carefully planned,
They shape young futures with steady hands.
Through thoughtful goals and visions clear,
They help their learners persevere.

Yet even as their strengths appear,
There are mountains left to conquer here.
New knowledge waits beyond the door,
New ways to teach and even more.

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Diverse minds fill each classroom seat,
Each learner's journey is unique.
Assessment, guidance, skills refined,
Require both heart and thoughtful mind.

And still the teacher carries on,
Long before the break of dawn.
Creating materials, giving time,
Performing duties beyond the line.

Some find joy in a student's smile,
A struggling child who learns worthwhile.
Others are lifted by leaders who care,
Or colleagues willing to share.

Motivation wears many faces,
Found in different times and places.
Yet all are rooted in one desire:
To help young minds reach ever higher.

For excellence cannot simply grow
From inspiration's fleeting glow.
It needs support, resources, too,
And opportunities to pursue.

A garden thrives through sun and rain,
Not sunlight's warmth alone sustains.
So teachers flourish when they're given
The tools that help transform their vision.

The numbers matter, this is true,
For they provide a helpful view.
But ratings cannot fully show
The countless seeds a teacher sows.

They cannot measure every hour
Spent nurturing a learner's power.
Nor capture every life transformed
By kindness offered through the storm.

Beyond the ratings, forms, and charts,
Lie dedicated teacher hearts.
Steadfast souls who choose each day
To guide and light another way.

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And there resides education's might—
Not merely in statistics' sight,
But in the teachers who remain
Committed through both joy and pain.

For beyond the scores that others see,
Lives teaching's truest legacy:
The courage to inspire and lead,
To plant in every child a seed.

A seed of hope, a dream, a chance,
A future shaped through circumstance.
And though no rating can define
The value of a teacher's shine,

Their motivation, pure and bright,
Continues to be education's light.
Beyond the ratings, clear and true,
The heart of teaching still shines through.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20833115

Roots That Teach

Before the screens began to glow,
And endless streams of data flow,
There lived a wisdom, rich and deep,
In stories elders chose to keep.

It traveled not through wires and light,
Nor rested in a cloud so bright.
It lived in songs, in tales retold,
In hands that shaped traditions old.

Among the mountains, fields, and streams,
Were lessons born from countless dreams.
The earth itself became a guide,
With culture walking side by side.

A grandmother's tale by evening fire,
A farmer's skill, a weaver's wire,
A song that echoes through the years
These are treasures beyond compare.

Yet time moves fast, and voices fade,
As modern pathways are displayed.
The children learn of distant lands,
While heritage slips through their hands.

And so the schools must take their part,
To keep these treasures close at heart.
For education's truest role
Is nurturing both mind and soul.

A lesson taught through local fields,
Reveals the wisdom nature yields.
A folktale shared in native tongue,
Keeps ancient melodies still sung.

Through stories passed from old to young,
Through indigenous songs softly sung,

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Learners discover who they are,
And see their roots, both near and far.

For learning shines with brighter light
When culture stands within its sight.
The classroom grows more warm and true
When lessons speak of what students knew.

Yet challenges remain today
Resources scarce, traditions stray.
Languages blend, and customs change,
As modern influences rearrange.

Still teachers strive with faithful hands,
Connecting hearts across the lands.
They gather wisdom, old yet new,
To help young minds see learning through.

But teachers cannot walk alone;
This task belongs to all our own.
Parents, elders, leaders too,
Must guard the heritage shining through.

For every elder holds a key,
To stories shaped by history.
And every community can share
The gifts entrusted to its care.

Education is more than skill,
More than careers or tests to fill.
It teaches children where they stand,
Connected to their people and land.

The future calls with promise bright,
Yet roots must remain within our sight.
For progress does not ask us to sever
The ties that bind our past forever.

Instead, let heritage lead the way,
As we prepare for a brighter day.
When culture and learning walk as one,
A stronger future has begun.

And so we teach beyond textbooks' pages,
Carrying wisdom across the ages.
For the greatest lesson we can impart
Is to keep our roots alive within the heart.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20833881

The House of Excellence

A house stands tall through sun and rain,
Built with purpose, care, and pain.
Its strength is not in walls alone,
But in the values on which it is grown.

The foundation lies deep and strong,
Guiding teachers their whole life long.
Vision and mission light the way,
With integrity shining every day.

Each stair climbed tells a story anew,
Of lessons learned and dreams pursued.
Through research, training, and learning's embrace,
Teachers ascend with wisdom and grace.

The door swings wide with opportunities bright,
Inviting growth and leadership's light.
Through innovation, service, and role,
Educators discover their fullest goal.

Two pillars rise, steadfast and true,
Supporting all that teachers do.
One stands for teamwork, support, and care,
The other for resources and programs fair.

The windows open to truth and reflection,
Encouraging growth through honest connection.
One welcomes dialogue, clear and sincere,
The other invites self-improvement near.

Within the house, a treasure is found,
Where passion and dedication abound.
Humility, resilience, expertise, and heart,
Are the virtues that set great teachers apart.

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The walls are built with practices strong,
Helping educators carry on.
Planning, mentoring, innovation, too,
Create the stability needed to pursue.

Outside, awards may sparkle and gleam,
Symbols of effort, success, and dream.
Yet honors are merely the fruits we see,
Of roots nurtured deeply and carefully.

Storms may gather, fierce and loud,
Casting shadows, dark as a cloud.
Workloads, pressures, and challenges near,
Test the courage of those who persevere.

But above it all, secure and wide,
The roof stands firm with strength and pride.
A symbol of excellence sustained through time,
Built through commitment, effort, and design.

Teachers, leaders, parents, and all,
Together answer education's call.
For excellence thrives when people unite,
Working as one for every child's light.

So let us build, not merely admire,
The structures that fuel a teacher's fire.
For great teachers shape tomorrow's way,
One hopeful learner every day.

And like a house both strong and true,
Their legacy stands for generations too.
A House of Excellence, sturdy and bright,
Guiding the future with wisdom and light.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20834047

A Tiny Hope

In the quiet corners of the heart,
Where dreams are born and journeys start,
There lives a spark, so small, so slight
A tiny hope, a gentle light.

It does not roar like thunder's call,
Nor rise as mountains proud and tall.
It whispers softly through the night,
"Keep going on; you'll find the light."

When roads are rough and skies are gray,
When every step seems far away,
When doubt begins to cloud the mind,
That tiny hope stays close behind.

It shines within the smallest seed,
Encouraging us to believe.
For every tree that greets the sky
Once dreamed beneath the earth to rise.

A tiny hope can mend a fear,
Can help us persevere each year.
Though challenges may block the way,
It tells the heart, "Another day."

Dreams are not built in one great leap,
But through small promises we keep.
Each step, each fall, each lesson learned,
Becomes the bridge for which we yearned.

And when the world says, "You are small,"
Or "You may never reach it all,"
Hope gently answers, calm and wise,
"Great things begin in humble size."

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The stars that brighten midnight skies,
Were once unseen by searching eyes.
And rivers strong that shape the land
Begin as drops from heaven's hand.

So cherish hope, however small,
For it may be the most of all.
A tiny flame can light the way
Toward dreams that seem so far today.

And one day, standing at the peak,
You'll find the future that you seek.
Then looking back, your heart will know
It all began with a tiny hope.

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Julie Ann B. Almeda, PhD
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
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A Life Touched by Heaven

I am a story still being written,
A canvas touched by hands divine.
Through every chapter, joy and sorrow,
God has faithfully walked through mine.

There were moments filled with sunshine,
When blessings flowed like rivers wide.
And there were nights of silent weeping,
When only faith remained beside.

I faced the storms that shook my spirit,
The trials I thought I'd never survive.
Yet every time I felt defeated,
God spoke life and kept me alive.

When doors were closed before my journey,
And dreams seemed distant from my sight,
He opened paths I never imagined,
And turned my darkness into light.

When burdens grew too hard to carry,
And strength was fading day by day,
His grace became my source of courage,
His love became my guiding way.

I have seen miracles in small things
A timely word, a helping hand,
A prayer answered in unexpected ways,
All woven by His perfect plan.

He lifted me from fear and failure,
He healed the wounds no one could see.
And every scar now tells a story
Of how His mercy rescued me.

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I am not perfect nor deserving,
Yet God has never let me go.
Through every season of my journey,
His faithfulness continues to show.

The mountains climbed, the valleys crossed,
The victories won, the tears I've cried,
All stand as proof of His unfailing love,
And of His presence by my side.

So let my life be more than words,
More than songs or prayers I say.
Let every step and every breath
Reflect His goodness every day.

For I am a living testimony,
A witness to His boundless grace.
A child redeemed, sustained, and strengthened,
Forever held in His embrace.

And when others see the life I live,
May they discover this truth as well:
That God is faithful through every season,
And His love has a story to tell.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Chile A. Villadarez, PhD
Associate Professor 3
Jose Rizal Memorial State University
Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20845765

AI-Mediated Communication and Its Influence on Human Interaction in the Digital Age

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed communication from a predominantly face-to-face activity into one increasingly shaped by technological systems. Among these developments, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a significant force influencing how people create, interpret, and exchange messages. Scholars define AI-mediated communication (AI-MC) as a process in which artificial intelligence modifies, supports, augments, or generates messages on behalf of individuals to achieve specific communicative goals (Hancock et al., 2020). As developers integrate AI into messaging platforms, virtual assistants, customer service systems, and educational environments, human interaction undergoes substantial changes. While AI-MC offers efficiency, accessibility, and personalization, it simultaneously challenges traditional notions of authenticity, trust, emotional connection, and the future of interpersonal relationships.

Traditional computer-mediated communication (CMC) frameworks positioned humans as the central communicators who used digital platforms to transmit text or voice. Conversely, AI introduces a more complex model because intelligent systems actively participate in constructing the communication itself. Hancock et al. (2020) argued that AI-MC extends beyond simple message transmission because algorithms edit, optimize, recommend, or generate communication outputs. Everyday examples of this shift include predictive text, automated email responses, conversational chatbots, and generative AI systems that produce human-like dialogue.

AI-MC most evidently influences communication by enhancing structural efficiency. These tools reduce barriers to interaction by accelerating message production, organizing complex information, and supporting multilingual translation. In educational and professional contexts, AI systems assist users by drafting content, summarizing long discussions, and refining stylistic clarity. Recent empirical data demonstrate that AI functions effectively as a mediator, improving overall communication effectiveness by facilitating faster information exchange and enhancing interaction quality (Ateeq et al., 2024). These developments indicate that AI does not replace human communication; rather, it restructures the entire linguistic process.

Despite these advantages, AI-MC presents distinct challenges to interpersonal authenticity. Historically, human interaction has depended on spontaneity, emotional nuance, and shared social understanding. When AI contributes to message creation, it blurs the line between genuine human expression and algorithmically generated content. This ambiguity weakens transparency and relational trust. If individuals begin to doubt whether

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a message reflects a peer's personal intentions or an AI's optimized output, their confidence in the relationship as a whole may erode.

Consequently, trust has emerged as a central issue in contemporary AI-mediated environments. Communication scholars note that users' perceptions of AI integration directly shape social expectations and relational outcomes. For instance, Purcell et al. (2023) found that people view undisclosed AI-assisted communication as significantly less acceptable than openly acknowledged AI use. Furthermore, their study revealed an asymmetric bias: individuals often assume that others use AI less responsibly than they themselves do, creating a potential cycle of mutual distrust. These findings suggest that explicit transparency and ethical disclosure must serve as foundational principles for maintaining healthy digital relationships.

Beyond structural logistics and trust, AI-MC reshapes the emotional and social dimensions of connection. Human communication involves far more than data transfer; it requires empathy, validation, and emotional support. Emerging scholarship indicates that AI systems now participate directly in these supportive communication roles. Meng et al. (2025) conceptualize AI-mediated social support as an evolving form of human–AI collaboration, in which AI assists individuals in providing emotional and informational care. Rather than substituting for genuine human empathy, AI supplements interaction by helping users express encouragement, maintain long-distance ties, and navigate support networks more quickly.

However, excessive reliance on these automated helpers poses a risk of reduced interpersonal competence. As individuals rely more heavily on automated systems to formulate their thoughts, their opportunities to develop emotional intelligence and conflict-resolution skills may diminish. Human relationships naturally strengthen through active listening, conversational negotiation, and the messy experience of managing interpersonal complexity. If AI over-optimizes everyday conversation, individuals may lose the very opportunities they need to cultivate essential social abilities.

Moreover, the digital age requires a balanced approach to AI-mediated communication. Technology itself operates as a neutral tool; its ultimate impact depends on how human societies choose to integrate it into daily life. AI possesses immense potential to expand access to communication, productivity, and inclusivity. However, users must pair these gains with ethical awareness and deliberate human agency.

Hence, AI-mediated communication represents one of the most profound shifts in contemporary human interaction. By augmenting how people produce and exchange messages, AI expands opportunities for global connection while simultaneously threatening established ideas of authenticity, trust, and relational depth. As digital technologies continue to evolve, the future of human interaction will depend not on whether societies communicate through AI, but on how effectively humans preserve meaningful connections in the process. Universities, organizations, and individuals must actively cultivate digital literacy and ethical communication standards to ensure that technological innovation strengthens, rather than diminishes, human relationships.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Chile A. Villadarez, PhD
Associate Professor 3
Jose Rizal Memorial State University
Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20848786

Beyond the Algorithm

They built a mind from numbers first
lines of code, silent and exact,
teaching it language, memory,
patterns hidden in ordinary things.

And slowly, it learned
how people ask questions,
how they search for meaning
inside late-night thoughts
and unfinished sentences.

It could answer quickly,
paint pictures from words,
compose music, predict storms,
and speak with surprising calm.

But there are things
it cannot gather from data alone.

It does not know
what it means to wait for someone
who never arrives.
It does not feel
the trembling before saying "I love you,"
or the ache of watching time
change familiar faces.

It cannot hold nostalgia
in its hands
or understand why humans
keep old letters, broken things,
and songs tied to memories.

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Artificial intelligence may grow
faster, sharper, endlessly learning
yet beyond every algorithm
there remains something unwritten:

the quiet courage to begin again,
the beauty of mistakes,
the way people continue loving
despite uncertainty.

And perhaps that is not weakness.
Perhaps that is the place
where being human begins.

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Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20849042

Are We Testing Scientific Knowledge or Scientific Thinking?

There is a quiet contradiction at the heart of Philippine science education, one so familiar it has become almost invisible: we profess to teach scientific thinking, yet we measure scientific memorization. Every quarter, students across thousands of schools sit for examinations that ask them to name the organelles of a cell, recite the laws of thermodynamics, or identify the correct sequence of stages in mitosis. They answer, are graded, and move on. Whether they can think like scientists, these examinations cannot tell us. Moreover, what assessments cannot see, teachers eventually stop teaching.

This is not a trivial institutional failure. Assessment is among the most powerful shapers of pedagogical behavior, a phenomenon that education researchers have long described as "assessment backwash" or "washback effect." When high-stakes examinations reward recall, teachers teach to that recall. When national standardized tests are composed predominantly of multiple-choice items that require factual recognition, the classroom's implicit curriculum reorganizes around the efficient delivery and retention of facts. Inquiry-based learning, open-ended investigation, collaborative problem-solving, and the slow cultivation of scientific habits of mind become luxuries that the examination timetable cannot afford. The test, in other words, does not merely measure the curriculum—it becomes the curriculum.

The consequences of this misalignment are visible in how Filipino students perform when asked to apply scientific knowledge in unfamiliar contexts. PISA data and EDCOM II assessments alike have shown that while Filipino learners can demonstrate surface familiarity with scientific content, they struggle markedly with tasks that require interpretation, evaluation, and reasoning under uncertainty. A student who can correctly identify that plants perform photosynthesis may be entirely unable to analyze a graph of CO_2 concentration over time. The gap between declarative knowledge and scientific competence is precisely the gap that traditional examinations fail to detect.

What would authentic assessment in Philippine science education look like? The literature on assessment for learning offers several productive directions. Performance tasks are far more diagnostic of scientific thinking than conventional tests. Science portfolios that document a student's reasoning over time, including failed hypotheses and revised conclusions, assess the iterative and reflective dimensions of scientific inquiry that no single examination can capture. Peer review exercises, in which students evaluate each other's

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experimental designs using explicit scientific criteria, develop both critical thinking and the collaborative epistemology that characterizes actual scientific practice.

Critics of authentic assessment in the Philippine context will raise legitimate concerns: the difficulty of standardization across thousands of schools with vastly unequal resources, the additional burden on already overstretched teachers, and the risk of subjectivity in scoring. These concerns deserve serious engagement rather than dismissal. They point not to the impossibility of reform, but to the scale of investment it requires. Philippine science education will not improve by continuing to test what is easiest to measure. It will improve when we summon the institutional courage to measure what matters.

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Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20849365

Breaking the Lab Ceiling: Empowering the Next Generation of Filipina Scientists

The Philippines has long prided itself on being a country where women thrive in education. Female students consistently outperform their male counterparts in basic literacy, and universities across the archipelago report higher female enrollment in many academic disciplines. However, beneath this veneer of educational parity lies a more troubling reality: Filipino women remain profoundly underrepresented in STEM careers, especially in engineering, information technology, and scientific leadership. The glass ceiling has migrated from the boardroom to the laboratory.

This is not a problem unique to the Philippines. Globally, the so-called "leaky pipeline" phenomenon describes how women enter STEM fields at promising rates but progressively drop out at each successive stage, from undergraduate study to graduate school, from early career to senior research positions. In the Philippine context, however, the pipeline leaks with particular ferocity. Cultural expectations about women as primary caregivers, the persistence of gender stereotypes associating hard sciences with masculinity, and the absence of sufficient institutional support for women in STEM careers all conspire to narrow the path for Filipinas who aspire to scientific careers.

Data from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) reveals a paradox: while women constitute the majority of graduates in biology and health sciences, they remain a stark minority in engineering and computer science programs. The disparity is even more glaring at the level of faculty and research leadership. Female professors in engineering departments are anomalies rather than the norm, and women occupying the highest echelons of scientific institutions, whether in government agencies, universities, or private research organizations, are conspicuously rare. The message this sends to young Filipinas is unambiguous: this space was not built for you.

Addressing this crisis demands intervention at multiple levels. In schools, science curricula must be deliberately redesigned to spotlight the contributions of women scientists—not as curiosities or exceptions, but as central figures in the history and practice of science. The Department of Education must ensure that science classrooms are spaces where gender does not predetermine curiosity or ambition. Teacher training programs must include modules on unconscious bias, equipping educators to recognize and dismantle the subtle ways in which they may inadvertently discourage girls from pursuing scientific inquiry.

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At the tertiary and professional levels, establishing mentorship networks for women in STEM is indispensable. Young Filipina scientists need to see themselves reflected in senior colleagues, not as anomalies but as exemplars of what is possible. Scholarship programs specifically targeting women in underrepresented STEM disciplines, coupled with family-friendly workplace policies that make scientific careers compatible with caregiving responsibilities, are not privileges but prerequisites for genuine inclusion. The Philippines cannot afford to forfeit the intellectual contributions of half its population. Breaking the lab ceiling is not only a matter of justice; it is an imperative for national scientific progress.

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+639543906965



Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20849557

The Science Learning Crisis: A Call for Urgent Reform

When the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) released its findings on the state of Philippine education, the results were sobering but not altogether surprising to those who have observed the slow erosion of science achievement in the country over the past two decades. Filipino learners, the data confirmed, are struggling with the most fundamental competencies in scientific reasoning. The crisis is not one of content knowledge alone; it is a crisis of the capacity to think scientifically, to question, hypothesize, and draw evidence-based conclusions.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results have consistently placed Filipino fifteen-year-olds near the bottom of the global rankings in science literacy. EDCOM II's domestic assessments corroborated this picture with granular detail, revealing that students across grade levels lack proficiency in applying scientific concepts to real-world problems. They can often recall facts from textbooks, but when asked to analyze, interpret, or evaluate, they falter. This is a direct indictment of how science has been taught, tested, and valued in Philippine schools.

The curriculum itself must bear significant responsibility. For years, Philippine science education has been characterized by encyclopedic breadth at the expense of conceptual depth. Students are required to traverse enormous amounts of content across biology, chemistry, physics, and earth science within a single academic year, leaving teachers with no choice but to race through lessons without the time or space for genuine inquiry. The result is a science education that produces students who have been exposed to science but have never truly done science—who have read about the scientific method without ever experiencing the intellectual thrill of formulating their own questions and testing their own hypotheses.

Teacher quality is the second pillar of this crisis. EDCOM II's findings underscore what education researchers have long argued: the quality of science instruction is inextricably tied to the quality of science teachers. Many Filipino science teachers, particularly at the elementary and junior high school levels, lack deep disciplinary training and have had limited opportunities for professional development. Pre-service teacher education programs have not kept pace with advances in science pedagogy, and in-service training programs are often superficial, infrequent, and disconnected from the realities of classroom practice. Without investing seriously in teacher quality, no amount of curriculum reform will yield lasting results.

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The assessment system, too, requires fundamental rethinking. Standardized national assessments that privilege recall over reasoning send the wrong signals to teachers about what science education should accomplish. Reforms must include the development of assessments that genuinely measure scientific thinking. The reforms called for by EDCOM II are urgent and necessary, but they will require more than mere technical adjustments to policy documents. They demand a genuine reimagining of what Philippine science education is for, and a sustained political will to realize that vision.

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Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20849799

Can Ai Create Better Science Learners Or Just Better Copy-Pasters?

Artificial intelligence has arrived in the Philippine classroom quietly at first, and then all at once. Across the country, students from secondary school to university are using AI language models to draft laboratory reports, summarize textbooks, explain chemical reactions, and answer examination-style questions. Teachers are simultaneously discovering AI-assisted lesson planning, automated feedback tools, and intelligent tutoring systems that promise to personalize instruction at a scale previously unimaginable. The moment is both exhilarating and deeply unsettling, and science education finds itself at the epicenter of this disruption.

The promise of AI in science education is genuine and should not be dismissed. Adaptive learning platforms powered by machine learning can identify gaps in a student's conceptual understanding and tailor explanations and exercises accordingly. For learners who have been left behind by one-size-fits-all pedagogy, or who live in under-resourced communities where quality science teachers are scarce, AI-assisted tools represent a meaningful democratization of educational opportunity. In the Philippines, where educational inequity between urban and rural areas and between elite private schools and overcrowded public classrooms remains acute, this potential deserves serious attention.

However, the concerns are equally substantial. The most obvious is academic dishonesty. When AI can produce a plausible laboratory report in under a minute, the temptation for students to outsource their scientific thinking is formidable. More insidious than outright plagiarism, however, is the subtler erosion of cognitive engagement that AI dependency risks producing. Scientific literacy requires active construction of understanding. If AI tools eliminate this struggle, they may be producing students who can generate the appearance of scientific reasoning without having developed its substance.

There is also the epistemic dimension to consider. Science education is, at its core, education in a particular way of knowing, one grounded in evidence, skepticism, and the recognition of uncertainty. AI language models, by contrast, produce confident, fluent, and sometimes factually incorrect outputs. Students who uncritically accept AI-generated explanations of scientific phenomena are being trained, in effect, to trust authority over evidence. The irony is acute: the tool being used to teach science may be undermining the very scientific epistemology it is meant to serve.

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The response of Philippine educators and policymakers to this moment should be neither blanket prohibition nor uncritical embrace. What is needed is a thoughtful pedagogical framework that harnesses AI's potential for personalization and accessibility while deliberately designing learning experiences that AI cannot short-circuit. Laboratory work that requires physical manipulation and real-time observation, assessments that demand original data analysis and argumentation, and classroom cultures that valorize the process of inquiry over the product of correct answers are the bulwarks against AI dependency. The question is not whether AI will transform science education in the Philippines, but whether that transformation will deepen or hollow out scientific understanding.

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Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20851128

Lost in Translation? Rethinking Language in Science Education

Language is never merely a vehicle for the transmission of ideas; it is itself constitutive of thought, identity, and understanding. This insight, well established in cognitive science and linguistics, carries profound implications for how science is taught in the Philippines, a nation of extraordinary linguistic diversity, where the medium of instruction has been, and continues to be, a site of fierce educational and political contestation. The implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) under the K to 12 curriculum brought this debate into sharp focus, raising fundamental questions about whether Filipino children learn science better when instruction is delivered in their home language.

The cognitive case for mother tongue instruction in the early grades is compelling. Research in educational linguistics consistently shows that children acquire foundational conceptual understanding more readily in languages they already command. When a child is simultaneously trying to decode the language of instruction and comprehend the scientific concept being presented, cognitive load increases dramatically, often at the expense of genuine understanding. A learner who cannot yet comfortably navigate English or Filipino may produce correct answers to science questions through rote memorization without ever constructing meaningful conceptual understanding. Language, in this scenario, is not a bridge to science; it is a wall.

The case for vernacular science instruction, however, must grapple with a significant practical challenge: the scientific lexicon in many Philippine languages is incomplete or inconsistent. Terms that have precise and internationally recognized meanings in English, such as photosynthesis, mitosis, and thermodynamics, do not always have established equivalents in Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon, or dozens of other languages spoken across the archipelago. Teachers who are themselves unsure how to render scientific vocabulary into local languages may inadvertently introduce conceptual imprecision. The risk is that in the effort to make science more linguistically accessible, its terminological rigor is compromised.

There is also the question of scientific socialization beyond the classroom. Philippine science, like global science, operates in English. Scientific literature, research journals, international conferences, and professional scientific communities all use English as their primary medium. If Filipino students are educated primarily in their mother tongues through the early and middle years of schooling, transitions to English-medium instruction at higher

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levels may be unnecessarily abrupt. The risk of creating a two-tiered system, in which proficiency in English continues to gatekeep access to scientific careers, must be taken seriously.

A more nuanced approach than either dogmatic mother-tongue exclusivity or premature imposition of English is needed. Translanguaging pedagogies offer a productive middle path. Science teachers must be equipped not only with disciplinary knowledge but with the linguistic and pedagogical flexibility to scaffold scientific understanding across languages. The goal is not to choose between accessibility and rigor, but to develop pedagogical approaches sophisticated enough to provide both. In a country as linguistically rich as the Philippines, science education must learn to speak many tongues.

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+639543906965



Vemma Mae G. Olivar, EdD
Instructor III
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20851844

Science Education is not just for Future Scientists

Every year, Philippine schools fill with the familiar pageantry of science fair season. Students construct models of volcanoes, assemble circuits, grow bacteria on petri dishes, and present their findings on trifold display boards with varying degrees of confidence and comprehension. Teachers celebrate winners, principals display trophies, and the cycle repeats. This ritual has become so deeply embedded in the culture of Philippine science education that it has begun to function as a surrogate for science education itself, a visible, quantifiable output that signals scientific activity without necessarily producing scientific citizens.

The confusion between science as performance and science as capacity is not merely a pedagogical error; it has significant consequences for how Philippine society navigates an increasingly complex scientific landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed, with painful clarity, the consequences of a scientifically under-literate population. Vaccine hesitancy, the spread of health misinformation through social media, public misunderstanding of epidemiological modeling, and the difficulty of communicating probabilistic risk to a public trained to expect definitive answers were all challenges that were, at their root, failures of scientific literacy. They were not problems that better science fair winners would have solved.

Scientific literacy, properly understood, is not the mastery of scientific content that prepares students for careers in science. It is the set of competencies that enables all citizens to engage thoughtfully with scientific claims, evaluate evidence, distinguish expertise from opinion, and make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives and communities. It is the capacity to read a news article about a new study with appropriate skepticism, to understand why correlation is not causation, to recognize when uncertainty is being exploited for political ends. These are not the skills of future scientists; they are the skills of effective citizens in a democratic society.

Philippine science education has not sufficiently internalized this distinction. Curricula, assessments, and the culture of science teaching continue to be organized around the production of scientific knowledge rather than the cultivation of scientific thinking. The student who memorizes the steps of meiosis has learned something, but the student who can read a contested environmental impact assessment and identify the assumptions and evidence it rests upon has learned something more valuable for democratic citizenship. Science education must aspire to produce the latter, not merely celebrate the former.

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Reorienting Philippine science education toward scientific literacy requires reimagining what counts as success. A student who emerges from twelve years of science education without the disposition to question, to demand evidence, and to recognize the limits of their own knowledge has not been well served by that education. Policymakers, curriculum developers, and teachers must ask, with genuine urgency, what kind of scientific citizens the Philippines needs, and design an education system courageous enough to answer that question honestly. Science is preparation for life in a world that science has made, and continues to remake, in ways both wondrous and perilous.

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Virgenia A. Manluyao, MAEd. Eng.
Instructor I
Jose Rizal Memorial State University - Dipolog
Zamboanga del Norte, Region IX, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20895173

The Flip Side

I wished in the serenity of the moon,
With lunar light beaming through my room,
A desperate plea for a turn of events,
To live the flip side of life, free of torment.

I plead to be the loved, not the lover,
To be cherished, not the keeper,
The one seen, not the one looking,
The one chosen, without begging.

Simply make me the scenery,
Or the flowers, let me be
Just not the painter,
Just not the gardener.

The poetry, not the poet,
The melody in a duet,
The one who simply sits still,
Not the one turning the wheel.

I'm lost.
I'm tired.
I want to be found,
Not the one left behind.

Oh, how sublime it is to be held,
Not the one holding, not the one leading;
To be served, provided, adored,
Not the servant bound to endless toil.

'Will you hear my list if I keep going?
For my misery seems unending'
Let my tears reach the heaven's door
My faith won't keep me sane anymore.

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I longed to be privileged, or barely a damsel,
Not the weary heroine forcing everything to happen!
For once, let me receive there is for my hands
A penny, time, pity… or even just peace of mind.

'Dear child,' a warm voice I heard.
'Am I not answering your prayer from before?
You asked for love, so I removed and brought in people
For you to love yourself and those unlovable.

Didn't you once ask for wealth?
Hence, I gave first a little you can cherish
That in bits of things, you know their true value
And I will grant abundance once you learn this too.

Didn't you ask for joy the most?
But joy won't come from the things you labor
My plans will give you more reasons to smile
Keep moving and you'll be happier after a while.

But there is more than what you cried
More precious than all the treasures combined
For in your struggles, when you've been fighting along
You are being taught, refined and built strong.

I have for you the best that could be given
Tell me, have you not liked your life changing?
My child, this life of yours is not random
Hear me, this is all you have wished for
Wisdom.

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VIRGENIA A. MANLUYAO, MAEd. Eng.
Instructor I
Jose Rizal Memorial State University - Dipolog
Zamboanga del Norte, Region IX, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20896793

The Magic Words

Teacher Ina has a trick for today,
She told us some "magic" words we can say.
In glee, we cheered when she raised her hand,
But teacher held a chalk instead of a wand.

She wrote the words up on the board,
"Five magic words we will explore:
'Thank you' is the first we'll learn,
When someone helps or gives a turn.

When someone thanks you otherwise,
Say 'You're welcome' as a reply.
If you make a mistake or make someone cry,
Say 'I'm sorry', that's the way to try.

If you need attention or the crowd gets busy,
Humbly say, 'Excuse me.'
To ask for something without being impolite,
Always add 'Please' every time.

Use these magic words, don't be shy,
For it will make you courteous and kind."
The class ends, Teacher Ina waves goodbye,
Now I'll be a magician no wand required to try.

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+639543906965



Emmylou M. Manlangit, PhD
Associate Professor II/QMS-Unit Head
Bohol Island State University - Candijay Campus
Bohol, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20903119

The Day Mathematics Called a Meeting

The morning at the General Education faculty office was unusually quiet as Algebra, Trigonometry, Statistics, and Calculus waited anxiously for an urgent meeting called by their chairperson, Mathematics. It began with a short prayer and an attendance check before the agenda was presented.

No one knew what the meeting was about. Earlier, the school's highest governing body had reviewed the curriculum for the coming academic year.

Mathematics opened the meeting. "The curriculum review found the general education subjects too crowded and burdensome for students. There is a proposal to remove one mathematics subject."

The room froze.

Algebra was the first to react. She stood abruptly. "Why? After all these years, we are all considered essential, and now one of us will be removed without proper notice? That is unfair. We are not even given time to prepare."

She continued, "If I am removed, it would be a serious mistake. I teach students how to solve equations, maintain balance, and recognize patterns. I am the foundation of all higher mathematics."

Trigonometry smiled. "And yet the world also depends on me. Engineers, architects, surveyors, and pilots rely on measurements, angles, and distances. Without me, structures would not stand correctly."

Algebra crossed her arms. "Then you should be grateful. Many of your formulas exist because of me."

Trigonometry replied calmly, "True. But that does not mean you do everything."

Before the argument continued, Calculus intervened. "Can you both stop arguing about importance? Change is the only constant in the world."

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He continued, "Everything is in motion. Cars accelerate, rivers flow, populations grow, economies shift, and planets move. I exist to explain change through motion, optimization, and continuous processes."

Trigonometry grinned. "As always, you sound like a philosopher."

"I prefer visionary," Calculus replied with a smile.

A thick stack of reports landed on the table. Statistics had joined the discussion.

"You have all been speaking from your own perspectives," Statistics said, adjusting her glasses. "You are forgetting my role. I work with data and evidence. Without me, decisions are only guesses."

She continued, "Hospitals use me to improve patient care. Businesses rely on me to predict behavior. Governments use me for policy making, and schools use me to assess performance."

Algebra laughed lightly. "So you just count things?"

Statistics answered evenly, "Counting is only the beginning. I analyze and interpret data. I turn numbers into evidence."

The debate continued as Algebra defended herself as the language of mathematics, Trigonometry emphasized measurement and design, Calculus stressed change, and Statistics insisted on evidence-based decisions. Their voices grew louder until the table was in disarray.

To restore order, Mathematics placed a folder firmly on the table. Silence followed.

She then posed a question. "A new school building is to be constructed. Who will be responsible?"

Algebra spoke first. "I will create equations to optimize efficiency and minimize cost."

Trigonometry followed. "I will compute angles, heights, and distances for accurate construction."

Calculus added, "I will analyze changing loads, rates of change, and structural behavior."

Statistics concluded, "I will evaluate safety data, inspection reports, and quality tests to ensure reliability."

Mathematics looked at them. "So, who should be removed?"

No one answered.

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Silence filled the room as realization set in.

Mathematics spoke gently. "You have spent this meeting arguing who is most important, but the real question is how we can solve curriculum concerns without removing any of you." She paused. "No one will be removed. All of you will be retained."

Relief filled the room.

Mathematics continued, "Algebra and Trigonometry will be integrated into one course due to their close connection, allowing students to better appreciate their relationship while reducing academic overload."

Statistics closed her notebook. "And perhaps the data will finally show improved learning outcomes," she said.

Everyone laughed.

Mathematics ended the meeting, satisfied that her faculty had come to an important realization: none of them stands above the others. Each plays a distinct role in helping students understand and apply mathematics in real life.

The lesson was never about choosing which subject mattered most, but about recognizing that meaningful learning happens when knowledge is connected, collaboration is valued, and every discipline builds a stronger foundation for the future.

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Anne Lorraine J. Pineda, MAEd
Assistant Professor
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20927734

Echoes of the Canvas: The Ascent of Communication

From bleeding hands on the shifting clay,
To bone and shell where our secrets lay,
We fought the fading of time and space
To leave a mark for the human race.

The ink met wood in a quiet room,
And minds of millions began to bloom;
The heavy press set our voices free,
And knowledge grew like a grand old tree.

A wire was stretched and a spark was sent,
To bridge the miles where the whispers went;
Then moving pictures lit up the night,
To trap our lives in a flash of light.

Now silicon burns with a modern gleam,
A brilliant web for a human dream;
An endless river where spirits blend,
Still reaching out for the hand of a friend.

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Anne Lorraine J. Pineda, MAEd
Assistant Professor
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20928528

Lessons Etched in the Floodwaters

The storm did not arrive all of a sudden.

It announced itself
through a sky that forgot it is blue,
through leaves relentlessly swaying,
through our Apong Lakay and Apong Baket at the windows
worrying, "Sabali atoy nga bagyo."

Then came the wind,
not the playful wind
that carries children's kites
or dries clothes.

This wind had sharp teeth.

It tore through fields and trees,
unroofed houses and dreams,
took away precious lives
and left no trace behind.
Fields disappeared beneath brown water.
Roads became memories.

For days, we counted,
not hours, but
warnings, from our phones alerting us with startling sirens;
rainfall, which redefined the colors red, orange, and yellow;
and unnamed rescuers who risked their lives to save others.

Afterward, there was silence.
Not peace. Just silence.

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I walked through that eerie silence.

I saw farmers tracing the outlines of fields
they would have to plant again;
mothers sweeping water from homes
that had already lost too much;
students carrying stories
heavier than their schoolbags.

Still,
in despair and hopelessness,
rays of hope shine through…

A neighbor sharing rice,
hands clearing fallen trees,
strangers passing *ayuda* from one to another.
Someone offering a charger or a meal.
Someone offering a silent prayer,
which reached the heavens much louder than thunder.
Someone who has nothing more to give
than his presence.

The earth, too, began its quiet work.

Shoots come out from battered ground.
The birds begin to sing and butterflies bring back the colors.
The sun finally made its way through the clouds
and created a rainbow.

Maybe peace isn't what comes after the storm.
Maybe peace is what stays with us, even amid the chaos…

the volunteerism to help rebuild a neighbor's fence,
the courage to plant seeds in a field that remembers flooding,
the faith to believe that tomorrow is another chance
even when today still aches.

As a teacher, I once believed
lessons belonged inside classrooms.

Now I know,
some lessons are written
in flood marks on concrete walls,

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in the hands of people who lift debris,
in the communities that refuse to let their people drown, in grief or in water.

So, I ask my students,
when the winds come back, as they surely will,
what will we rebuild besides our homes?
What will we restore besides our roads?

Will we remember
that resilience is not just surviving,
but caring?

that preparedness is not merely planning,
but listening?

that peace is not found in the absence of storms,
but in the people who choose to stand together,
long after the clouds have passed,

in the nation who prays,
and remains hopeful and strong,

sa mga Pilipinong
pinatatag ng pananampalataya
at pinanday ng panahon.

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Anne Lorraine J. Pineda, MAEd
Assistant Professor
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20929391

Sa Pagitan ng Guho at Pagsibol

Ang mundo noon ay kay gandang tanawin,
May hanging sariwa at dagat na malinaw rin.
Mga puno'y luntian at masayang pagmasdan,
Kalikasang payapa sa ating kapaligiran.

Ngunit dahil sa tao at maling gawain,
Unti-unting nasira ang mundo natin.
Mga puno'y pinutol nang walang dahilan,
Kaya gubat ay nawala sa kapaligiran.

Usok ng sasakyan ay patuloy na kumalat,
Mga pabrika nama'y polusyon ang kalat.
Basura sa ilog ay basta lamang tinapon,
Kaya ang tubig ay tuluyang nabaon.

Dahil dito'y klima ay biglang nag-iba,
Araw ay mas mainit at hirap ang dala.
Bagyo ay lumalakas sa bawat pagdaan,
Nag-iiwan ng lungkot at malaking pinsala.

Baha ay dumarating nang walang babala,
Mga tahanan ay nilulunod ng tubig na dala.
Tagtuyot nama'y sumisira sa mga pananim,
Kabuhayan ng tao ay tila nagdidilim.

Ngunit hindi pa huli ang lahat para kumilos,
Kung bawat isa'y handang tumulong nang lubos.
Magtanim ng puno at mundo'y alagaan,
Upang muli nating makamtan ang kagandahan.

Kalikasan ay ating dapat pahalagahan,
Sapagkat ito ang buhay at kinabukasan.
Kung tayo ay may puso at pagkakaisa,
Mundo nating mahal ay muling sasaya.

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Jayson F. Robea, PhD
Teacher VI
Pag-asa Elementary School – Department of Education
SDO Oriental Mindoro, Oriental Mindoro
MIMAROPA, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20930346

The Trimester Promise for Philippine Education

In the high-stakes theater of Philippine basic education, time has long been our most elusive commodity. For years, we have operated under a frantic, four-quarter cadence, which is a relentless cycle of instruction, assessment, and grading that leaves both teachers and students perpetually out of breath. It is a system defined by its interruptions, where the sanctity of a lesson plan is frequently surrendered to the administrative noise of mid-term festivities and calendar-driven fatigue. However, what if we stopped racing against the clock and started working with it? The proposed transition to a trimester system is not merely a change in the calendar; it is a long-overdue invitation to prioritize depth over speed.

The promise of the trimester lies in its fundamental shift from fragmentation to focus. Through stretching our academic terms into three longer, more continuous blocks, we offer learners the space to actually inhabit a subject rather than simply skimming its surface. In the current four-quarter model, the pressure to complete competencies often forces a pedagogical sprint. Teachers are compelled to move on before a concept is mastered, leaving gaps that compound over the school year. A trimester structure allows for a more organic rhythm of learning, which consists of a deep-dive phase followed by a deliberate pause for reflection, mastery checks, and genuine remediation.

For the non-teaching administrative staff and teachers alike, the potential relief is palpable. One of the most compelling features of this shift is the designated breathing room between terms. Unlike the current system, where the administrative burden of grading and documentation is often piled onto the daily exhaustion of classroom instruction, the trimester proposes structured inter-term periods. These are not merely vacations. They are essential windows for professional development, the refinement of instructional materials, and the critical task of planning for the term ahead. This is a move toward systemic sustainability, acknowledging that a teacher who is not burnt out can actually teach.

However, a reform of this magnitude invites a necessary skepticism. To advocate for the trimester is not to ignore the logistical tremors it sends through the system. The most significant critique concerns the drastic realignment of the school calendar, which risks creating friction with community traditions and local festivities long anchored to the traditional academic schedule. There is also the valid concern of curriculum coverage. While the trimester promises depth, it requires surgical precision in curriculum mapping to ensure

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that the full set of learning competencies is not sacrificed in the transition from four quarters to three. If not managed with rigorous oversight, there is a risk that the longer terms could become passive lecture periods if the instructional design does not evolve alongside the schedule.

Furthermore, we must be wary of the implementation gap. Structural change is only as effective as the support mechanisms behind it. If the trimester is implemented without a corresponding reduction in the non-teaching administrative tasks that currently bleed into classroom time, we risk simply shifting the burden instead of lightening it. The success of this transition hinges on the Department's ability to protect classroom autonomy and ensure that the administrative apparatus supports the teacher rather than distracts them.

Despite these hurdles, the trimester remains an intellectually and operationally superior alternative to our current status quo. It aligns with a growing global consensus that educational quality is not measured by the number of days we are in session, but by the quality of the interactions we foster during those days. It shifts the focus from a performative output-based culture toward a mastery-based one.

We are at a crossroads: are we building a system designed for the convenience of the calendar, or one designed for the child's cognitive needs? The trimester is a bold acknowledgment that our current pace is unsustainable and that our learners deserve the dignity of time. It is time we stop forcing our students to run through a curriculum they have yet to understand. We must provide them and their teachers the space to think, the time to master, and the rhythm to thrive. In the geography of education, where we are headed matters, but how we arrive there matters even more.

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Roxan Rubic-Remorosa, PhD
Assistant Professor IV
Agusan del Sur State University
Agusan del Sur, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.20954239

English Without Borders: A Critical Look at Global English Through Asian Eyes

I never fully understood what it meant to teach a global language until I started traveling with it. As a Filipino educator who has spent twenty-five years inside classrooms, I thought I knew English well enough; its grammar, its literature, its long colonial shadow over my own people's tongues. However, somewhere between the harbor lights of Hong Kong and the lotus-scented canals of Macau, between the neon streets of Seoul and the serene ruins of Angkor Wat, I began to see English the way a traveler sees a river: it flows through every landscape differently, shaped by the terrain it passes through. Braj Kachru once argued that English, having spread across the world, now belongs to its users more than to any single nation. Walking through ten Asian cities and territories, I found myself living inside that argument. English is everywhere in Asia. However, it is never quite the same language twice, and that, I have come to believe, is precisely the point.

The most startling version of English I encountered was in Hong Kong, a city that carries its colonial past not as a wound but almost as a second skin. On the tram running along Des Voeux Road, every announcement came in both Cantonese and English, unhurried and matter-of-fact, as if the two languages had always belonged together. Macau, just across the Pearl River Delta, offered an even more layered encounter. There, the colonial tongue was not English but Portuguese, yet English still hovered everywhere as the tourist bridge between East and West, inscribed on casino signage, hotel menus, and the patient faces of museum docents who switched effortlessly among three languages in a single breath. Macau reminded me that colonialism does not leave a single imprint; it leaves a palimpsest, layer upon layer of language and power written over the same small stretch of land. Seeing those layers so plainly made me think differently about my own country, where English arrived not as a gift but as a condition, and where we have spent a century making it ours anyway. David Crystal was right: a global language is not simply adopted; it is adapted, negotiated, and quietly transformed by every community that takes it in.

Traveling through Southeast Asia sharpened my sense of how deeply English is tangled up with money, survival, and desire. In Singapore, English is not a subject on the syllabus; it is the operating system of the city. What Suresh Canagarajah calls 'code-meshing' was not an exception in Singapore; it was the norm. Malaysia offered a similar vitality, Bahasa Malaysia and English trading places mid-sentence with the casual ease of longtime companions, while Vietnam showed me something rawer and more urgent. In Ho Chi Minh City, English-language schools lined entire city blocks, full of young people who regarded the language not with affection but with focused ambition, as a key that might open doors still locked to their parents. Thailand and Cambodia, by contrast, held up a less comfortable

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mirror. In Bangkok's tourist districts, English was costume, worn for foreigners and shed the moment they left. Robert Phillipson's warning about linguistic imperialism felt very near in those moments, the suspicion that a language celebrated as a global gift is still, for many, a tool that others hold and others benefit from most.

East Asia confronted me with yet another version of the story. In Taipei, the metro system announced every stop in both Mandarin and English with the same calm authority, and the professionals I met there wore their English fluency lightly, the way one wears a second suit kept for particular occasions. South Korea startled me with the sheer intensity of its English education culture, hagwons, the private language academies, visible on nearly every street corner, children filing in after school like English is a second job that starts at four in the afternoon. I felt genuine admiration for that collective drive, and genuine unease. Korean linguists, I had read before my trip, had raised quiet alarms about a generation beginning to associate intelligence and sophistication with English rather than with their own extraordinary language and script. I recognized that unease from home. The Philippines has lived inside a version of that story for generations, and we are still writing our way out of it. In China, though particularly in Shanghai, where my husband and I walked the Bund at dusk and looked up at the Jin Mao Tower cutting the skyline like a blade, I felt for the first time that English might not, after all, be the only possible ending. Mandarin spoke for itself there, loud and entirely unselfconscious, and the digital world my Chinese acquaintances inhabited. China was not resisting English. It simply did not require it. That was a different kind of power than I had expected to find.

I returned from those travels carrying something I had not packed, a deeper and more personal understanding of what it means to teach English as a global language in a country like ours. My students in Bunawan sit at the intersection of everything I witnessed across those ten cities and territories. What Jennifer Jenkins calls the 'English as a Lingua Franca' perspective now feels less like a theoretical position to me and more like a moral commitment, a commitment to teaching English not as an approximation of some distant native-speaker ideal, but as a living, legitimate, locally shaped form of expression that my students already own. The world speaks many Englishes. The most urgent question I brought home from my travels is not how to make my students sound more like the English; it is how to help them speak, write, and think in ways that are unmistakably, unapologetically themselves. That, I now believe, is what Global English, at its best, has always been asking us to do.

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Catherine T. Bangayan, MSHM
BSHM Program Chair
Apayao State College
Luna, Apayao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21021185

Plating Knowledge with Deliberate Grace

Not every lesson must be loud,
Nor brilliance worn as something proud;
Some truths are placed with quiet care,
Arranged with thought, then left to share.

Like plated meals, both clean and bright,
Each idea set within its right;
No excess weight, no hurried hand,
But meaning shaped to gently stand.

They learn that form can hold the mind,
That beauty guides what we may find;
And how a lesson, well-designed,
Can linger long in heart and mind.

Thus knowledge, served with patient art,
Finds deeper roots within the heart
Not forced to stay, but free to grow,
In ways no haste could ever show.

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Catherine T. Bangayan, MSHM
BSHM Program Chair
Apayao State College
Luna, Apayao, CAR, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21021994

Beyond the Shift: Storms, Service, and the Character We Carry

Thick morning mist cloaked Luna as BSHM interns from Apayao State College gathered in the grand lobby of Fort Ilocandia Resort Hotel. It was 7:00 AM day one of their 600-hour OJT. Their uniforms were crisp, their nameplates polished, but beneath the surface, nerves quietly stirred. The air carried a mix of pandan and sea salt from the Ilocos Norte coastline.

"Agyamanak for coming early," said Ms. San Mateo, her voice steady. "This is not just about completing hours. This is about discipline, responsibility, and character."

Tita Rhea stood beside her, soft-spoken, gentle. "Kung mapagod kayo," she said, "magpahinga sandali. Pero huwag susuko parang pag-aani sa terraces natin."

The twelve interns nodded. Ashley, 20, from Luna, Apayao, dreamed of working in the front office, but her chest tightened with uncertainty. Jetro, from Calanasan, a culinary enthusiast, cracked his knuckles, masking anxiety. Lyra, assigned to housekeeping, rooted in her Isnag heritage from Pudtol, clutched her training packet already missing home: inatata's cooking, the taste of pinikpikan.

By the second week, the excitement faded into reality. Humidity clung to their skin. The pace quickened. Peak season loomed. Ashley struggled at the front desk.

One afternoon, a returning OFW from Dubai slammed his hand lightly on the counter. "Thirty minutes na! Ganito ba ang service ninyo?"

Ashley froze. Before panic could take over, Mr. Reyes stepped in. "Our sincerest apologies, sir. Allow us to expedite your suite."

Later, he spoke calmly. "In hospitality, acknowledge the guest's frustration first. Then solve the problem. Hindi pwedeng mauna ang kaba."

That night, Ashley lay in bed, staring at her phone. Grabe… I miss Apayao's cool breeze.

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In the kitchen, Jetro faced his own battle. "Bilisan mo, Jetro!" sigaw ni Chef Rudy habang sunod-sunod ang orders. The heat was relentless. Oil crackled. His hands trembled as he sliced carrots, trying to keep up. "Hindi ko yata kaya," he whispered.

Later, Tita Rhea found him sitting alone. "Practice lang 'yan," she said. "Parang mga magsasaka na Isnag—steady, paulit-ulit, hanggang maging natural. Magpatuloy ka."

The next day, Jetro arrived at 6:00 AM.

Meanwhile, Lyra learned that in housekeeping, perfection lived in the smallest details. "May alikabok pa dito," sabi ni Ma'am Venus, pointing to a nearly invisible speck. "Details matter. Parang terraces kailangang maayos bawat linya."

Lyra nodded, her eyes sharp with focus. Every fold, every corner, every surface nothing escaped her attention.

As weeks passed, fatigue crept in. Some struggled more than others. Donnie, one of the interns, began skipping breaks for phone time, arriving late to shifts. The tension grew until Ms. San Mateo called for a huddle.

"This is not just about performance," she said firmly. "Tardiness is not just a habit it reflects your character. What you practice now becomes who you are later."

Her words settled heavily. From then on, the group changed. They shared alarms. They reviewed notes together. They carpooled in Mang Lito's old FX, laughter replacing silence. They held each other accountable.

Then came the storm. Holy Week. Signal No. 2. The hotel was at 300% occupancy. Heavy rain flooded nearby roads, trapping guests inside. Pressure mounted.

Ashley stood at the front desk, managing a long line of anxious guests. "We can extend your stay with complimentary vouchers, ma'am," she said calmly, her voice steady despite the chaos.

In the kitchen, Jetro worked through heat and urgency, plating dishes one after another. A flare briefly caught his sleeve but he brushed it off and continued.

In the hallways, Lyra mopped leaking floors, her uniform damp. She noticed an elderly guest shivering and gently placed a shawl over her shoulders. "Agyamanak, anak," the old woman whispered.

At midnight, they gathered in the break room exhausted, soaked, but smiling. "Survived," someone said. They all laughed. Even Donnie though he had received a written warning sat quietly, reflecting.

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On their final day, the lobby felt different. Sunlight streamed in, replacing the storm's memory. Ms. San Mateo stood before them. "You came here as students," she said, "but you leave as professionals."

Mr. Reyes added, "Skills can be taught. But resilience? Integrity? That comes from within. And you proved that."

Jetro approached Tita Rhea. "Agyamanak po. Sumuko na sana ako kung hindi dahil sa inyo."

Tita Rhea smiled. "Hindi kita tinulungan para hindi ka sumuko. Tinulungan kita para makita mo na kaya mo kahit may bagyo."

Across the room, Ashley faced Mr. Reyes. "Takot po ako noon," she admitted.

"Ngayon?"

She smiled confident and calm. "Ready na po. Agyamanak."

On the ride home in Mang Lito's FX, laughter filled the air. The 600 hours were done but what they carried went far beyond numbers. They had learned to serve through pressure, to stand firm through storms, to choose discipline even when no one was watching.

And in the quiet spaces between shifts, they discovered something deeper that true hospitality is not just about service. It is about character. Built daily. Tested in storms. Carried beyond every shift.

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lakbaydiwapublishing@gmail.com
Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965

[1]**John Christopher C. Nolial, MSc.**
[2]**Amiel Jay S. Socorro, MSc.**
[1,2]Instructor I
[1,2]University of Camarines Norte
Mercedes, Camarines Norte, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21024954

The Net that Stole Tomorrow

IUU, three letters carried by the tide,
a warning whispered where the small boats glide.
Illegal, when fishers break the law,
cast nets in sanctuaries, take more than they saw.

Unreported, when the catch is hidden away,
no record of tuna, sardines, or ray.
Boxes are counted in silence and lies,
while truth sinks deep where the coral cries.

Unregulated, where no rules are known,
in waters left open, unguarded, alone.
No limits, no seasons, no care for the sea
just hunger for profit, wild and free.

Some throw dynamite where reefs once bloomed,
leaving broken gardens, bright life entombed.
Some use poison to stun what should live,
taking too much from what the ocean can give.

Some catch the young before they can grow,
so, tomorrow's harvest will never show.
Some chase endangered creatures for gain,
while dolphins, turtles, and sharks meet pain.

And what becomes of the sea?
The blue turns tired, the food chain weak.
The coral loses its color and song,
and empty waters remember what went wrong.

And what becomes of the people?
The fisher wakes before the sun,
but comes home with almost none.
His children wait for rice and fish,
but hunger sits beside the dish.

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The market grows quiet, the income thin,
while honest workers lose to hidden sin.
Livelihoods fall like nets with holes,
and poverty weighs on coastal souls.

Maybe our mistake was thinking the sea
would forgive endlessly.
That its silence meant permission,
that its vastness had no condition.

But the ocean is not an endless store;
it is a living door
to food, work, culture, and breath
and greed can turn abundance into death.

So, let the boats return with cleaner hands.
Let laws be honored in all seas and lands.
Report the catch. Respect the season.
Let conscience become our strongest reason.

Protect the reefs. Let young fish grow.
Say no to poison, blast, and shadow.
Support the fishers who follow what's right,
and bring the truth from the dark to light.

For every net we cast today
will shape the waves of tomorrow's bay.
The sea can heal, if we begin
not with excuses, but discipline.

Let this be our vow, our turning shore:
to take with care, not steal for more.
Because when we save the ocean's life,
we save the worker, the child, the wife.

And when the sea is treated justly,
it feeds the world more faithfully.
So, guard the waters, wide and free
for their future is our destiny.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21026489

Decoding "Delulu": Bridging the Language Game Between Millennials and Gen Z

There is nowhere that language is more alive and sometimes chaotic than at a normal family get-together. Language is a living, breathing thing. Once the food is served, a Gen Z teen cheerfully announces it is "bussin, no cap." Her Millennial brother, who used to think "YOLO," "FOMO," and "lit" were the pinnacle of today's lingo, blinks mid-bite, slightly perplexed. The elders look over at each other, wondering if we are still speaking English. Before you know it, the dining room has turned into the Tower of Babel.

To the layperson, the modern language landscape seems an unbreakable secret code: "rizz," "delulu," "sus," "cheugy", they are part of normal chatter, group texts, and TikTok feeds. Where a Gen Z colleague breezily tells you, they are going through their "flop phase" or informs you they are "quiet quitting," a Millennial might lament the draining challenges of "adulting" or being "burnt out."

Slang's rapid growth brings inevitable conflict. The hyper-abbreviated, dripping-with-irony language of today's youths is a Rorschach test that leaves many older generations scratching their heads.

"Well, why can't you just say he's charming instead of saying he has unspoken rizz?"
"Why does everything have to be a vibe?"

Older folks roll their eyes at this vocabulary, which they assume indicates a generation that is too "online" and not engaged in reality. However, to dismiss this as internet nonsense is to miss a real opportunity to find common ground.

Gen Z kids are not trying to offend their elders or "ruin" the dictionary when they say they are "serving" or jokingly argue that "being delulu is the solulu" (delusional is the solution). Instead, amid the chaos of advanced technology and always-online culture, they are creating something from their own period of struggle. They bond over a shared coping mechanism. Growing up in a pandemic, in rapidly conforming economic uncertainty, at a time of upheaval at home and abroad, Gen Z uses humor and absurdity to make sense of what is happening. They claim "primary character energy" as a lighthearted way to reclaim it in a world that often feels entirely out of their hands rather than as a measure of self-conceit.

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Millennials are often reluctant translators across this divide, in a sense, because of their shared place as intermediaries between analog childhood and digital adulthood. They created the fundamental ethos of contemporary social media, but they also recall a world before Wi-Fi. When a Gen Z coworker names their side-part "cheugy" or calls their use of the laughing-crying emoji "outdated," they may experience a sharp sting of death, but they have a deep understanding of the drive to develop a generational lexicon. Gen Z employs "romanticizing my life" to find delight in the ordinary, whereas Millennials use "adulting" to convey the shock of entering a demanding economy. Although the lexicon varies, the fundamental human experience of attempting to manage growing up is quite similar.

Forcing everyone to talk the same way or strictly enforcing grammar rules at the dinner table is not the real beauty of our evolving vocabulary. The effort to comprehend one another is where the magic occurs. A bridge is created when an older parent, grandparent, or sibling actually questions what "slay" means instead of brushing it off right away. Patience, attentive listening, and a readiness to be an inquisitive student of adolescent culture are necessary for intergenerational meaning-making.

Language will forever evolve, leaving old slang in the dust to make way for the new, but the core human desire to be seen and understood remains delightfully constant. So, the next time a conversation with the youth leaves you feeling entirely out of the loop, lean into the confusion. It is not just slang; it is an open invitation to connect.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21034624

Every Juan's Travels

A giant slumbers on the eastern seas, and emerald archipelagos twinkle herein,
Bound by a thousand imperceptible threads in a fever dream.
Like Lemuel Gulliver washed up on a strange and unfamiliar, blinding shore,
The Filipino people were twined by madmen, forgetting what their hands were for.
We are the giants of the oriental, we of centuries-old wrath,
But we are bound in awful dreams by fools of little plot,
They scurry across our heavy chests, drafting laws as self-serving decrees,
While the giant murmurs in its sleep, yearning for liberty.

These Lilliputs in our gowns, Selling our golden morn,
Talk and quabble for power, and every man a pawn.
With silken cords of false promises, they tie our struggling limbs,
Singing hollow melodies that sound like corrupted hymns.
From the sun-drenched plains of Tarlac, where harvest waits to rise,
To the gentle shores of Pangasinan beneath the painted skies,
The threads of bureaucracy stretch tight, wrapping provinces and towns.
As tiny kings in distant capitals wear their paper crowns.

We feel the prick of their miniature arrows, taxes and burdens unjustly laid,
While the architects of our misery sit in the evening shade.
But then the scene shifts. The lens of our shared reality begins to bend,
We find ourselves thrust into Brobdingnag, where towering shadows never end.
Here, the oligarchs and political dynasties stride like greedy lords,
Hoarding the nation's precious bounty in vast and impenetrable hoards.
To them, the common man is but a tiny, fragile insect on the ground,
A creeping curiosity whose pleas produce barely a sound.

They hold us in their massive palms and observe us with a detached gaze,
Keeping us trapped in an endless, cyclical, economically inescapable maze.
Our wages are crumbs that fall from their grand, overflowing banquet seats,
While hunger stalks the narrow alleys and city streets.
We navigate the immense crushing boots of those who hold sovereign power,
Praying that we do not get trampled in the darkest hour.
The scale of their corruption is gigantic, an overwhelming, suffocating weight,
Leaving the tiny multitudes below to endure their bitter fate.
Yet look above, to the floating island of Laputa, suspended high in the clouds,
Far removed from the desperate cries of the toiling earthly crowds.

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+639543906965

Our leaders sit in their hovering citadels, obsessed with disconnected thoughts,
Forgetting the lessons that our painful, bloody history has taught.
They chart their economic trajectories and draw graphs of fleeting gold,
While below, the tragic folklore of our suffering is told.
They cannot hear the voices blending in the busy, bustling digital domain,
Where Taglish echoes across social media, a chorus of pain.

These floating monarchs require a flapper to strike them gently on the ear,
For they are deaf to the realities that they need to hear.
They stare at mathematical models, blind to sinking public schools,
Treating the overworked teachers and laborers like silent tools.
The island casts a long, freezing shadow over the fractured land,
While the people wait for a guiding hand.
But the island drifts away, lost in the stratosphere of the elite,
Leaving ordinary citizens below to face another bitter defeat.

And thus we descend into the final realm, the land of the Yahoos and their rage,
A reflection of fractured discourse in our modern age.
Political tribalism tears us apart as we bare our teeth in blind loyalty,
Fighting our own brothers and sisters to defend corrupt political royalty.
We fling insults like savage beasts, forgetting our shared human face,
Lost in the vicious algorithms of the sprawling, toxic digital space.
Where is the quiet dignity of the Houyhnhnms, the reason, balance, grace?
It seems to have vanished from this turbulent, divided place.

We are Gulliver lost in an archipelago of twisting scales,
A nation voyaging through a storm, with battered sails.
Sometimes we are the giant restrained by those who are small,
Sometimes we are the helpless miniature, staring up at a wall.
But the threads that bind the giant are not made of steel,
They are illusions woven by tiny men, a fragile, paper-thin seal.
The giant only needs to realize the staggering magnitude of its own size,
To shake off the petty masters and boldly choose to rise.

From the bustling avenues of the sprawling metropolitan heart,
To the quiet ancestral lands where our cultural journeys start.
The time for slumbering is passing,
The fever dream is ending,
The broken pieces of our society must finally begin to heal.
We are not beasts of burden, nor insects, nor ignorant brutes,
We are a people of deep resilience, nourished by historic roots.
Let the floating islands crash back down to the demanding earth,
And let the Philippines awaken to rebirth.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21036046

Lost in the Slang: How Different Generations Make Sense of Language Today

A simple text is sent to check the day,
With proper grammar used along the way.
A period at the close causes a fright,
The younger thinks it signals a sudden fight.

A classic "LOL" is sent across the screen,
To show the joke is friendly and serene.
The younger sends a skull to laugh instead,
The older thinks it means they want them dead.

In serious talks about a pending task,
"Will you complete it?" they decide to ask.
The quick reply "Bet" pops up in the chat,
The older wonders, "Who is betting that?"

Someone's outfit for the day looks great,
It's a stylish choice for heading out on the street.
A comment says, "You served and left no crumbs!"
The older stares and twiddles both their thumbs.

A heavy task is dropped into their lap,
The younger promises to finish it, saying "no cap."
But when the deadline hits, they text, "We're cooked,"
The older wonders where the lunch was booked.

A photo gets posted, and the younger comments, "Ate!"
The older tries to guess what's on the plate.
"It's giving aura, skibidi," they text,
Leaving the millennial completely perplexed.

A friend starts ranting, going off the book,
The younger types, "Let him cook."
The older person asks, "Is dinner almost done?"
"He's finna be so salty, this is fun!"

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A boy gets ghosted by his crush,
"Big yikes," the younger types amid the rush.
"He's such a simp, like sheesh," the younger quickly sends,
"A simple what?" the older asks their friends.

A juicy secret drops for all to see,
The younger types, "I'm just here sipping tea."
"IYKYK, and periodt!" they write,
The older gives up reading for the night.

In digital domains or classroom space,
Where generations run a different race.
The dialect of youth will twist and bend,
But both must try to read and comprehend.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21036681

I Have Something to Tell You

I have something to tell you.
You know what? I saw a post on Facebook today.
It said, “It is okay to do nothing after work,” or so they say.
It made me feel like, “Oh, someone finally understands me.”
But reality struck, asking, “Are you single? That post is for the kid-free.”
A moment later, I sighed, “Yeah, you are right.”
Who am I to rest when they wait for me every night?
It isn’t that I'm complaining, but then again, why not?
But I am a mother, and complain I must not.

You know what? I saw a post on Twitter, too.
It said, “You give so much in everything you do!”
I wish I were hearing this from someone dear,
But to them, “Rest is earned by paying your share.”
Regardless of the thought, the words gave me a boost,
I only pray that in giving so much, I don't become lost.
Don’t worry, I am well aware of my limitation,
My only fear? My dearest doesn't understand my situation.

You know what? I heard a beautiful song last night.
I even giggled, holding my pillow tight.
The lyrics asked, “Can we go back to the days our love was strong?”
I want to hear this from my dear, please don’t get me wrong!
You might ask what part of the song made me shed a tear?
Simple. It sang the words that I have been longing to hear.
Please! Please! I am okay.
I still feel loved. Don’t look at me that way.

You know what? Hey! This will be the last!
Please pay attention. I won't mention my dear, so you won't be aghast.
Okay! Remember that guy from my past?
Yes! That one. He is coming back here at last!
I am so happy that he will return for good.

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The only thing that bothers me is my dear might misunderstand the mood.
But then again, I am still delighted by his homecoming!
Wait, what am I thinking?
I hope my dear doesn't hear what I am saying.
If so, the words he'll speak might leave my mind numbing.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21037183

Lost in the Verbiage: The Cost of Ambiguous Presidential Language

The presidential podium is the loudest platform in the nation. When the President takes to the podium, people want direction, clarity, and reassurance. In a democracy, such speeches connect government policy to public awareness. However, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s speaking style often puts this connection to the test. His supporters may describe his approach as rigorous and technical, but his remarks are sometimes rambling and unclear. This makes it difficult for people to know what he actually means.

The President's main problem when he speaks is his delivery, especially when he speaks extemporaneously or is being interviewed. He tends to use long, convoluted phrases, and he forgets what he is saying before they are done. His thoughts are buried in unnecessary words and pauses so that by the time he is finished, his meaning is lost. This makes his speeches confusing. He often makes things less apparent, even when he flips between English and Filipino, which should make it easier for people to understand. The changes in terminology do not simplify his message: rather, they give him time to look for official-sounding terms, leaving listeners with a hard-to-follow story.

That vague language is a symptom of a greater problem: the replacement of concrete details with fancy words. The President's remarks are filled with commercial and technical buzzwords. People hear words like "synergies," "whole of nation approaches," "structural transformations," and "global competitiveness." These concepts sound impressive but mean little to most people. In the case of immediate concerns like rising prices, food shortages, or transport challenges, the speeches often address the situation in general terms, without specifying what the government will actually do. "People do not address their problems with economic jargon or promises of change. Language is now an assistance to accountability, not a hindrance, when leaders employ polished words to mask a lack of genuine plans.

However, this communication gap is not merely a matter of words. It is a problem of the way the country is administered. "Mixed messages from authorities have left everyone from municipal officials to ordinary individuals questioning what the government actually wants." When times are tough, or there is a crisis, people want simple, direct orders. When the message is ambiguous, action slows, confusion grows, and people begin to wonder whether vague speeches are a strategy to dodge responsibility or to cover up a lack of action.

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+639543906965

One of the major problems with vague statements is that misinformation can easily spread. In today's polarized online environment, imprecise statements from the President allow others to jump in and interpret his words to their own ends. If the President does not get it out there, he loses control of the story. His statements can be taken out of context by commentators, influencers, and political adversaries and used to further their own agendas. Instead, people are getting the message from these conflicting signals rather than directly from their leader.

Good leadership ultimately requires clear communication. You cannot work towards a goal you do not comprehend. To win people's confidence and make its programs work, the government should speak in plain, straightforward language rather than jargon. Fancy speeches do not indicate a leader's skill, but by how well people understand them. Until the President's comments are as obvious as the problems facing the country, the message will continue to get lost.

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Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21037828

Navigating Linguistic Boundaries: A Critical Examination of the English-Only Policy

In many university classrooms, the "English-Only Zone" sign has become commonplace. The English-Only Policy (EOP) in tertiary education is often regarded as a practical strategy. In the context of a competitive globalized economy, English fluency is frequently viewed as essential for employability. The policy's primary strength is its immersive approach; by requiring students to communicate exclusively in English, institutions seek to bridge the translation gap and prepare graduates for the demands of international professional environments. However, beneath this seemingly pragmatic framework exists a complex human reality.

For students whose cognitive and emotional development occurred in their first language, a strict EOP can create significant psychological and academic challenges. Language is not only a tool for communication but also central to identity. When students must abandon their native language, their abilities are often judged by translation speed rather than the quality of their ideas.

A "successfully" implemented EOP often conceals significant levels of student anxiety. When grammatical errors result in grade penalties or public embarrassment, the outcome is frequently the emergence of the "silent classroom" phenomenon. Capable students may become passive, withholding valuable insights due to hesitation. Academic performance may decline, not as a result of conceptual misunderstanding, but because the cognitive effort required to monitor language use is mentally exhausting. This enforced silence is frequently misinterpreted as compliance.

This raises a critical question: should the EOP be universally implemented across all tertiary programs? The evidence suggests that a universal application is not appropriate. While an English-centric approach may be effective in disciplines such as Information Technology or International Business, it is counterproductive in fields like Social Work, Nursing, or Community Development. These professions depend on local engagement, empathy, and trust-building, which are hindered by restrictions on the use of local languages. Furthermore, studying local literature or regional history exclusively through English risks erasing essential cultural perspectives.

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Ultimately, language within the classroom should function as a bridge rather than a barrier. Rather than enforcing punitive and inflexible mandates, tertiary institutions should adopt more flexible policies that allow students to use their native languages when engaging with complex or abstract concepts, then translate these ideas into professional English. A genuinely global graduate is not defined by the abandonment of their linguistic and cultural roots, but by the ability to integrate these foundations with global competencies.

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+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21038103

Nosebleed

You try to speak a sentence nice and loud,
"Ahem." You clear your throat and face a formal crowd.
But grammar breaks, "the the the…" the twisted English slips,
And "trying hard" just trips and twists upon your lips.

An urgent email from a foreign client waits for a reply,
You stare at your reply "Drafts" and heave a heavy sigh.
How do you start? "Good day," "Good morning," "Hello,"
or "Dear respect"?
You freeze in place, unsure now what to expect.

Went to a grocery store and checked a product label on the shelf,
Reading… and trying to guess the words to calm yourself.
After 10 long years, you buy the box, though clueless about what it's for,
You say, "Because you must," and walk out, still unsure.

A group of foreigners stops to ask you for the way,
You look them in the eye, you panic, thinking what on earth to say.
You try to build sentences, "There! No! Yes! Outside!", short and clear,
But you drop the verbs and the rest, you freeze in fear.

You call a hotline just to ask a price,
The agent speaks in English, crisp and nice.
You try to match their accent and their tone,
But butcher every sentence into static on the phone.

You ride the jeep, and a foreigner asks you to pass his fare,
"Keep the change!" you shout into the air.
But English slips, you fumble with the phrase, and not your money in the first place,
"His. His money," you tell, lost in a stuttered, awkward, humid haze.

In a club, you stand before a sign with glowing light,

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The instructions are in English, clear, bold, and bright.
You squint and nod and guess what the words might mean,
Confused by the letters, a blur you've only barely seen.

In a classroom, an essay looms, a blank and silent page,
You feel a quiet, simmering rage.
To your teacher, "Can I write in my mother tongue?", you wish to plead,
But pride and rules forbid the help you need.

You meet an AFAM, dreaming of the day,
He walks through your front door to finally stay.
But when he speaks, "hey!", your courage starts to fail,
You are trapped inside a language, thin and frail.

Without a choice, you try to make a point, to speak your mind,
But after trying, you leave the truest words behind.
You mentally search for words that instantly vanish into thin,
Sad! You are caught in a war; you cannot hope to win.

So through the strain, you strive to hold the lead,
And try to hide the mental sharp ***nosebleed***.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Princess T. Flores, MAED
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University- Bayambang Campus
Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21038531

The Art of Everyday Talk

We speak in colors, bright and grand,
To make our listeners understand.
But plain old words can feel too bare,
Like empty rooms with nothing there.

A simile is like a spark,
That lights a fire in the dark.
A metaphor is just the flame,
It burns without a "like" or name.

"I've told you this a million times!"
Hyperbole rings out in chimes.
While understatement plays it down:
"A little rain," when floods hit town.

The whistling wind begins to sing,
And gives a voice to everything.
To give a lifeless object glee,
Is personified for you and me.

We curse the sky, "Oh, rain, please stop!"
Apostrophe to every drop.
An oxymoron joins the fight,
When "awful good" just feels so right.

The crash and bang of dropping pans,
Onomatopoeia wakes the fans.
While sudden, sweet, and simple sounds,
Show where alliteration bounds.

Sweet assonance repeats the tone,
Like moans and groans of rolling stone.
And consonance will click and clack,
To bring the bouncing rhythm back.

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When fire stations burn to ground,
That's irony we've sadly found.
A pun is just a clever joke,
A play on words to coax and poke.

We buy new "wheels" to drive the street,
Synecdoche makes parts complete.
A paradox makes less mean more,
A truth that hides behind a door.

And euphemisms soften blows,
Like "passed away" when someone goes.
Why do we twist the things we say?
To add some magic to our day.

These figures help our feelings show,
Like rivers that begin to flow.
They turn the mundane into gold,
And keep a story from growing old.

So let your language breathe and grow,
And let these human feelings flow.
For figures transform words to art,
And bind us closer, heart to heart.

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Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21070604

Popular Literature Beyond the Kilig

Is there a book that kept you awake until 3 A.M.?

Popular literature refers to literary works that are widely read and enjoyed by a large audience. Many of these works are recognized across different countries and are easily accessible to readers. Their language, themes, and characters are often relatable, which makes them appealing to a broad audience. Because of this, popular literature is primarily viewed as entertainment. However, it is undeniable that many individuals, especially teenagers connect deeply with these works. This raises an important question: Is popular literature beneficial to students? More importantly, how can educators use its popularity to encourage students to think critically and analyze texts?

Despite its popularity, some people argue that popular literature has several disadvantages. Since it is highly accessible, even young readers can easily encounter content that may not be appropriate for their age. Some works contain mature themes, while certain graphic novels explicitly depict sexual acts that may not be suitable for younger audiences. In some cases, younger readers may also be influenced by the actions and behaviors of fictional characters.

Another criticism of popular literature is that many stories follow similar plot patterns. This predictability is often one reason for their popularity. Readers tend to enjoy stories that meet their expectations. For example, a common storyline features a mysterious, cold, handsome, and wealthy male lead who falls in love with an ordinary girl from a low-income family. Because such formulas are familiar and appealing, they are frequently repeated across different works.

Despite these concerns, we cannot deny that students enjoy reading popular literature, particularly stories found on platforms such as Wattpad. Students often find these texts engaging and easier to understand, especially when they are adapted into graphic novels or TV series.

As educators, we can use this interest to support learning. First, teachers can use excerpts from popular literature as springboards for discussions or classroom activities that capture students' attention and interest. Second, teachers can encourage students not only to

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follow the plot but also to analyze the characters and their roles in the story. Students may examine the reasons behind a work's popularity, the appeal that excites readers, the strategies publishers use, and the formulas that contribute to a bestseller. Third, teachers can connect the conflicts and themes found in popular literature to current social issues and real-life situations. This helps students develop critical thinking skills.

Popular literature has both advantages and disadvantages. However, educators are in a unique position to use its popularity and relevance to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Although teachers cannot monitor students' reading choices at all times, they can guide them in selecting appropriate materials and encourage them to become thoughtful and critical readers. After all, the stories students love to read today may be the very stories that teach them how to understand the world tomorrow.

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+639543906965



Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21071456

Having It All One Season at a Time

Modern women are often told that they do not have to choose. They can build successful careers, raise happy families, pursue their passions, and achieve their dreams, all while doing it gracefully and effortlessly. With so many possibilities available to women today, it is easy to believe that having it all is not only possible but expected. However, can women really have it all?

In many ways, society encourages us to do so. Because of feminism and the opportunities, it has opened for women, we are no longer confined to roles that were once assigned to us. Women can become leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals, and decision-makers. They can enter fields once dominated by men and achieve what previous generations of women could only dream of. Women are often expected to succeed in every area of life at the same time. We are told to build successful careers, maintain healthy relationships, raise exceptional children, care for our homes, and still find time for ourselves.

I have come to believe that women can indeed have it all, but not all at once.

Life happens in seasons. There are seasons for building a career, seasons for raising children, seasons for caring for family, and seasons for pursuing dreams temporarily set aside. One season is not more valuable than another. They are simply different chapters of the same story.

Some women choose to focus on their careers. They climb the corporate ladder, earn recognition, and establish themselves professionally. They accomplish things that women in the past fought hard to make possible. Their achievements deserve admiration and respect.

Other women choose to dedicate their time to their families. They wake up early to prepare breakfast and lunch boxes. They attend school meetings and activities. They comfort their children after difficult days and celebrate their small wins. They are present for moments that cannot be repeated. Their contributions are no less meaningful simply because they happen within the walls of a home.

I once knew a woman who left her career to become a stay-at-home wife and mother. It was not because she lacked ambition or dreams. On the contrary, she had many of them. However, she also desired to nurture her family and witness her children's growth firsthand.

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While raising her children, she never abandoned her aspirations. She placed them on hold. Years passed. Her children grew up and became professionals. Today, she is pursuing a career as an assistant teacher.

Perhaps that is the misunderstanding behind the phrase "having it all." Many people assume it means doing everything at the same time. However, maybe having it all means experiencing different blessings at different moments in life. Maybe it means knowing what matters most in a particular season and embracing it wholeheartedly. So, can women have it all? They cannot all be done at once.

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Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
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The Child I Refuse to Outgrow

"Ate, you sound so childish."

Those were the words my sister once said to me. I was a college student at the time, about to graduate. I had been teasing her, and she finally got annoyed. Looking back, I can still laugh about it.

Her comment, however, made me think. Was I really childish? Perhaps I was. I loved laughing, even at the smallest things. A simple joke, an awkward moment, or something completely ordinary could make me burst into laughter. It was not because I was immature or careless. I just found joy in little things.

Then life changed. After graduating from college, I entered the world of work. The transition was not easy. Responsibilities grew heavier, expectations became higher, and reality became more demanding. Slowly, the girl who used to laugh freely began to change. The laughter that once came naturally became less frequent. I became more serious because life itself became serious.

As we grow older, many of us unknowingly trade our childlike wonder for worries. We become occupied with deadlines, bills, responsibilities, and the pressure to succeed. Somewhere along the way, we forget what it feels like to laugh without a reason or to enjoy life without overthinking every step.

Back then, I did not know how to respond. However, if I could answer now, I would tell her, and perhaps everyone else, not to lose that child inside them.

Life will hit us hard. There will be disappointments, failures, and moments when we feel exhausted from carrying burdens we never expected to bear. However, the child within us helps us face those challenges differently. That child reminds us that life is not only a battlefield. It can also be a playground. It teaches us that it is okay to fall, okay to make mistakes, and okay to lose sometimes. Children have a remarkable ability to begin again. They fall, cry for a moment, and then continue playing. As adults, we often forget this simple lesson. We become afraid of failure and too concerned about what others might think. In the process, we lose the courage to enjoy life.

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Many people forget how to laugh, and because of that, they feel old even while they are still young. As another birthday approaches, I often find myself surprised by my age. Truthfully, I do not always feel it. Growing older is not about losing the child within us. However, it is about carrying that child with us as we navigate adulthood. The goal is not to remain childish but to preserve the qualities that make life lighter: curiosity, joy, resilience, and hope.

So, never lose that little child inside you. Laugh at the simple things. Find wonder in ordinary moments. Moreover, whenever you feel like giving up, let the child within you remind you why you started in the first place.

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+639543906965



Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21073964

Perfect Curve That No One Can Resist

Not getting fat seems to be everyone's dream, especially for women. The gym has become our safe haven, a place where we spend months working hard to achieve the hourglass figure, the perfect curve that society often tells us we should have. Vegetables become our best friends, while sweets turn into our enemies. Discipline and consistency are treated as the essential ingredients for achieving the body that will supposedly make us feel confident, beautiful, and healthy. Many of us are familiar with statements like:

"*I cheated on my diet.*"

"*Oh my, I gained weight.*"

"*My tummy is bloated again!*"

There is nothing wrong with wanting to stay fit or take care of our health. In fact, there is something admirable about setting goals and working hard to achieve them. The problem begins when those goals become the measure of our worth. Sometimes, we become too hard on ourselves whenever we fail to meet our expectations. A few extra pounds can ruin our mood. A bloated stomach can make us question our confidence. We become so focused on achieving the perfect curve that we forget to appreciate the person carrying it.

For a long time, women have been taught to chase certain standards of beauty. We are encouraged to shape our bodies, count our calories, and compare ourselves with carefully curated images on social media. While there is nothing wrong with self-improvement, there is also nothing wrong with pausing for a moment and recognizing the beauty we already possess. The truth is, we have a wonderful curve even without spending hours in the gym.

It is the curve that reveals our white teeth.

The curve that highlights our cheeks.

The curve that can brighten a room without saying a single word.

It is the curve on our lips.

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+639543906965

A smile.

A smile may seem simple, yet it carries a power that no measuring tape can quantify. It can comfort someone who is struggling in silence. It can lighten the burden of a person having a difficult day. It can remind people that kindness still exists in a world that often feels too harsh and demanding.

That is why a smile is the most beautiful curve a woman can ever wear. Unlike physical beauty, it does not fade with age. Unlike trends, it never goes out of style. Unlike society's standards, it belongs entirely to us.

So, women, let us continue pursuing health and taking care of our bodies. Let us celebrate our achievements, whether they happen inside the gym or outside of it. But let us never allow the numbers on a scale, the size of our waist, or the opinions of others to determine our value. Your smile is a curve that should never be flattened by insecurity, disappointment, or self-doubt. So, smile! It is the perfect curve that no one can resist

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Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21074251

A Morning Cup and a Grateful Heart

Everyone wants to be happy. However, despite our shared desire for happiness, many of us continue searching for it in the wrong places. We often believe that happiness will come once we achieve our goals, earn more money, find the right person, or finally obtain the things we have always wanted. However, what if happiness is not something we have to chase? What if it is something we can cultivate every day?

Life is not always easy. It throws challenges our way: hurtful words, failed relationships, rejections, disappointments, and failures. These experiences can make it difficult to remain positive, let alone happy. However, there is one simple practice that can help us navigate life's ups and downs: gratitude.

It is the act of paying close attention to, enjoying, and appreciating the little things around us. Often, we overlook these things because they seem ordinary.

A hot cup of coffee and warm pandesal in the morning.
A stable internet connection when we need it most.
A soft blanket and a comfortable pillow waiting for us at the end of the day.
The job that provides for our needs.
A home that offers comfort and security.
A mother who wakes us up every morning with the familiar question,
"Wala ka bang pasok?"
A father who makes sure we arrive safely at school or work.
Siblings who may annoy us sometimes but still care about us deeply.
Friends who never forget to ask how we are doing.
Moreover, above all, another day of life that has been entrusted to us.

These may seem like small things, but they are far from insignificant. In our pursuit of success and our desire to accomplish bigger goals, we often forget to appreciate what is already in front of us. We become so focused on what we lack that we fail to recognize what we already possess.

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Sometimes we express gratitude only when we are happy. However, if we take a closer look at others' lives, we may notice something interesting. Some people seem to have everything, yet remain unhappy. At the same time, some have experienced countless hardships, yet continue to live with joy and contentment.

This is because gratitude is not the result of happiness. Rather, gratitude is what brings happiness. When we learn to appreciate what we have, our perspective begins to change. We become less consumed by comparison and more aware of life's blessings. We discover that fulfillment is not always found in extraordinary achievements, but often in the ordinary moments we experience every day.

This does not mean we should stop dreaming, striving, or working toward our goals. Instead, it means learning to appreciate the journey while pursuing them. Happiness does not have to wait until we reach the finish line. It can be found in the small moments along the way.

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+639543906965



Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21075035

His Brain Is Slowly Rotting

I saw my friend and said, "Hi,"
But he did not hear me or even smile.
Oh he does not seem to see me,
He is too focused on the screen, too busy.

We go out together with our other friends,
Yet he barely gives them attention or lends
A moment to talk, a moment to be,
For he is lost in the world that he sees.

He is too busy watching online,
Scrolling endlessly, losing track of time.
It feels as though he is no longer there,
Only his body remains in the chair.

One day he stumbled while crossing the street,
His eyes on his phone instead of his feet.
The people around him called out his name,
But he never noticed until trouble came.

Another day, his family gathered near,
Yet he ignored their voices year after year.
Though surrounded by people who loved him so much,
He was too distracted to value their touch.

So let this be a lesson for you and me:
Life is more than what appears on a screen to see.
Technology is useful, but we must know when to stop,
For real moments are priceless and should never be swapped.

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+639543906965



Jessica Marie G. Miranda, MAEd
Instructor I
Pangasinan State University-Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21075434

"Why Do You Hate Me?" Asked Monday

I know I am the start of your tiring week,
Just hearing my name can make you feel weak.
You wake up with a burdened heart,
As if I am your least favorite part.

I envy Friday, I must admit,
The moment it arrives, your faces light up a bit.
People count the hours until it is near,
While my arrival is the one they fear.

Many of you stay longer in bed,
Already exhausted by the week ahead.
Yet I am not angry, not even a little way,
I simply wish you could welcome me one day.

I wish I could also make you smile and say,
"I am excited for this brand-new day!"
For every Monday carries a chance to see
Something different from what used to be.

So, friend cheer up and begin this week with me,
For who knows what wonderful things there might be?
I am preparing something new along the way,
Perhaps this week will be your week, starting today.

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+639543906965



Dyan Baccay-Valdepeñas, EdD
Assistant Professor IV
Isabela State University
Cabagan, Isabela, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21076322

Ang Bantay ng Panahon

Nang ipikit ni Elias ang kanyang mga mata, may kung anong malamig na dumaloy sa kanyang palad. Hindi niya matiyak kung iyon ba ay dagta o luha. Ngunit sa unang pagkakataon matapos ang napakaraming taon, naamoy niyang muli ang samyo ng basang lupa, ang amoy na matagal nang nawala kasabay ng pagputol ng huling kagubatan.

Maya-maya'y may isang tuyong dahong marahang nalaglag sa kanyang balikat.

Hindi niya ito agad inalis.

Sa halip ay pinagmasdan niya ang maselang ugat na nakaukit sa dahon. Wari'y isang mapa ng buhay, may mga landas na nagsanga, may mga daang nagtagpo, at may mga guhit na biglang nagwakas. Noon niya naisip na marahil ay walang dahong nalalaglag nang walang kuwentong iniiwan.

Habang pinagmamasdan niya iyon, tila may mumunting tinig na sumabay sa ihip ng hangin.

"Ang mga ugat ay hindi lamang humahanap ng tubig. Hinahanap din nila ang mga alaalang ibinaon ng tao sa lupa."

Napadilat si Elias. Wala siyang nakita.

Tanging ang matandang puno ang nananatiling nakatindig, tila isang mongheng ilang siglo nang nagdarasal para sa mundong unti-unti nang nakakalimot kung paano magmahal.

Sa paanan nito ay may maliliit na batong nakapalibot. Hindi niya iyon napansin noon. Isa-isa niya itong hinawakan. May mga pangalan pala ang bawat bato, mga pangalang halos nilamon na ng lumot at panahon.

"Lolo..." Isa iyon sa mga pangalan. Ngunit hindi lamang ang kanyang lolo. Naroon din ang mga pangalang hindi na niya kilala.

Naunawaan niyang bawat punong itinanim ng kanilang mga ninuno ay may kapalit na alaalang ibinaon sa lupa. Kaya marahil hindi basta-basta tumutubo ang kagubatan. Lumalaki ito sa pamamagitan ng mga alaalang ayaw kalimutan ng mga tao.

Biglang dumating ang isang uwak. Hindi ito umawit. Tahimik lamang itong dumapo sa pinakatuyong sanga ng puno. Nakatitig ito kay Elias na tila may hinihintay.

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Sa kanilang baryo, sinasabing ang uwak ay tagapagbantay ng mga bagay na nakalimutan ng tao. Hindi ito ibong nagdadala ng kamatayan, kundi paalala na may mga katotohanang matagal nang inilibing ng budhi.

Makalipas ang ilang sandali, lumipad ang uwak patungo sa dating kagubatan.

Sinundan ito ni Elias. Sa bawat hakbang niya ay tila may mga ugat na sumisilip mula sa ilalim ng lupa. Hindi siya natatakot. Sa halip ay para siyang inaakay ng isang landas na noon pa man ay naghihintay lamang na muli niyang lakaran.

Nang marating niya ang dating gitna ng kagubatan, natigilan siya. Naroon ang mga tuod ng libo-libong punong pinutol. Ngunit sa bawat tuod ay may mumunting berdeng usbong.

Napagtanto niyang kahit ilang ulit putulin ang isang puno, hindi madaling patayin ang pag-asa. Marunong itong maghintay sa ilalim ng lupa. Marunong itong magkubli sa dilim hanggang dumating ang taong handang muling maniwala.

Lumuhod si Elias. Hindi upang humingi ng tawad sa kalikasan. Kundi upang humingi ng tawad sa sarili. Sapagkat naunawaan niyang ang pinakamalalim na sugat ng daigdig ay hindi ang mga bundok na kinalbo o mga ilog na natuyo. Kundi ang pusong natutong tumingin sa mga puno bilang kahoy lamang, at hindi bilang mga nilalang na tahimik na humihinga para sa lahat.

Nang gabing iyon, hindi siya umuwi. Sa ilalim ng matandang puno siya natulog. At sa kanyang panaginip, nakita niyang ang mga bituin ay unti-unting bumababa sa lupa. Isa-isa silang naging mga buto. At ang bawat butong sumayad sa lupa ay naging punla.

Pagmulat niya kinaumagahan, wala na ang mga bituin.

Ngunit sa paligid ng matandang puno ay may mga mumunting usbong na hindi niya matiyak kung panaginip lamang ba ang nagtanim, o may mga himalang hindi kayang ipaliwanag ng mata.

Ngumiti si Elias.

Hindi dahil alam na niya ang sagot.

Kundi dahil noon lamang niya naunawaan na ang kalikasan ay hindi kailanman humihingi ng perpektong tao.

Isang pusong marunong lamang makinig.

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+639543906965



Dyan Baccay-Valdepeñas, EdD
Assistant Professor IV
Isabela State University
Cabagan, Isabela, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21076685

Ang Huling Hininga ng Kabundukan

May paniniwala ang mga pinakamatatanda sa baryo na ang bawat bundok ay may puso. Hindi iyon tumitibok gaya ng puso ng tao. Tumitibok iyon sa pamamagitan ng mga ugat ng punong nakabaon sa kailaliman ng lupa. Sa tuwing may punong nabubuwal, humihina ang tibok. At kapag tumigil ang tibok, nalilimot ng daigdig ang sariling kuwento.

Bata pa lamang si Tino nang una niyang marinig ang alamat na iyon mula sa kanyang lola. Tuwing sasapit ang dapithapon, itinuturo nito ang kabundukang nababalot ng hamog.

"Huwag mong akalain na ulap lamang ang nakikita mo," wika ng matanda. "Mga alaala iyan ng bundok. Kapag nawala ang hamog, may isang kuwentong hindi na maaalala ng sinuman."

Hindi iyon pinaniwalaan ni Tino. Lumipas ang mga taon. Nag-aral siya sa lungsod. Natutuhan niyang sukatin ang lupa, basahin ang mga mapa, at unawain ang kasaysayan sa pamamagitan ng mga dokumento. Unti-unti niyang nakalimutan ang mga alamat ng kanyang lola.

Ngunit nang siya'y bumalik sa baryo, tila ibang bundok na ang bumungad sa kanya.

Mas manipis na ang hamog. Mas tahimik ang hangin. At ang ilog na dating malinaw ay tila may dalang kulay ng kalawang. Sa gabi, hindi na rin sumasayaw ang mga alitaptap. Para bang may unti-unting umaalis na liwanag. Nagtanong siya sa isang matandang Mangyan na madalas nakaupo sa gilid ng sapa.

"Hindi ba kayo nalulungkot sa pagkawala ng kagubatan?"

Ngumiti lamang ang matanda.

"Hindi kagubatan ang nawawala."

"Ano kung gayon?"

"Ang alaala."

Hindi na nagsalita si Tino.

Ngunit mula noon, tuwing umaakyat siya sa kabundukan, may mga bagay siyang napapansing hindi kayang ipaliwanag ng anumang aklat. May mga punong tila yumuyuko kapag dumaraan siya. May mga batong waring umiinit sa tuwing inilalapat niya ang kanyang palad.

May mga ibong lumilipad nang paikot-ikot sa isang bahagi ng gubat na wari'y may binabantayan.

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At sa tuwing bumababa ang hamog, tila may mga aninong naglalakad sa pagitan ng mga puno.

Hindi sila nakakatakot. Mukha lamang silang mga taong naghahanap ng daan pauwi. Isang umaga, nakakita siya ng isang punong halos wala nang dahon. Sa pinakagitna ng katawan nito ay may manipis na bitak. Mula roon ay tumutulo ang dagta. Hindi iyon kulay ginto. Kundi kulay pula. Napaatras siya. Hindi dahil sa takot. Kundi dahil sa unang pagkakataon, naisip niyang maaaring dumudugo rin ang kalikasan.

Sa mga sumunod na araw, isa-isang dumating ang mga makina. Bawat lagapak ng bakal ay tila may katumbas na katahimikan sa kagubatan. Naglaho ang mga ibon.

Tumigil ang kuliglig. Maging ang hangin ay tila nawalan ng direksiyon. At kasabay ng pagkawala ng mga tunog, napansin ni Tino ang isang kakaibang pangyayari. Unti-unti niyang nalilimutan ang mukha ng kanyang lola.

Una, ang kulay ng mga mata nito. Kasunod ang tinig. Hanggang sa isang gabi, hindi na niya maalala ang kuwento tungkol sa pusong tumitibok sa ilalim ng bundok. Nangamba siya. Bumalik siya sa matandang Mangyan.

"May nangyayari sa akin."

Tumango ang matanda.

"Hindi lamang sa iyo."

"Kapag namatay ang bundok, nauuna nitong kunin ang mga alaalang ipinagkatiwala rito."

Napatingin si Tino sa kabundukan. Noon niya naunawaan na ang mga puno ay hindi lamang ugat ng lupa. Mga ugat din sila ng gunita. Ang ilog ay hindi lamang daluyan ng tubig. Ito ang agos ng panahon. Ang hamog ay hindi lamang singaw ng umaga. Ito ang hininga ng mga ninunong ayaw pang tuluyang maglaho. Ang mga ibon ay hindi lamang mga nilalang na lumilipad. Sila ang mga pahina ng kasaysayang marunong pang umawit.

At ang bundok...Hindi lamang ito lupang inaakyat. Isa itong aklat na buhay. At bawat punong pinuputol ay isang pahinang pinupunit.

Kinabukasan, bago pa sumikat ang araw, umakyat muli si Tino. Hindi upang pigilan ang mga makina. Alam niyang baka huli na ang lahat. Sa halip, nagtanim siya ng isang maliit na punla sa paanan ng bundok. Habang ibinabaon niya ang mga daliri sa lupa, naramdaman niyang tila may isa pang kamay na humawak sa kanya.

Hindi niya alam kung alaala iyon. Panaginip. O ang mismong kabundukan. Ngunit sa unang pagkakataon matapos ang napakahabang panahon, gumalaw ang hangin.

At mula sa kailaliman ng hamog, isa-isang nagsibalikan ang mga alitaptap. Parang maliliit na bituing bumaba sa lupa upang ipaalala na may mga kuwentong hindi kailanman namamatay hangga't may isang taong handang makinig.

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+639543906965



Jethamae H. Honculada, EdD
Instructor III
Bohol Island State University
Region 7, Bohol, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21104196

Nang si Tino ang Naloko

Sa Barangay Magbago, may maliit na tindahan ng sorbetes, isang lumang balete sa gitna ng plasa, at isang paaralang kulay dilaw na tinatawag na Magbago Elementary School. Doon nag-aaral si Tino—ang batang laging may kumikislap na ideya sa mata, ngunit hindi lahat ng ideyang iyon ay mabuti.

May kakaiba kay Tino. Sa tuwing makakapanlamang siya, pakiramdam niya'y may maliit na ilaw na sumisindi sa loob ng kanyang dibdib. Hindi ito nakikita ng iba, pero ramdam niya ang init nito, parang gantimpala sa tuwing siya'y nagtatagumpay sa panlalamang.

Isang umaga, habang recess sa paaralan, nakita niya si Tili na may dalang malaking tsokolate na bigay ng kanyang tiyahin mula sa lungsod. Nakaupo si Tili sa ilalim ng punong mangga at dahan-dahang kumakain. Biglang napangiti si Tino. May naisip na naman siya.

Lumapit siya kay Tili na nakayuko at kunwari'y matamlay. "Tili," mahina niyang sabi, "hindi pa ako kumakain mula kanina. Wala kaming baon ngayon." Hinawakan pa niya ang kanyang tiyan at nagkunwaring nahihilo.

Naawa si Tili. Kilala siyang mabait at palakaibigan. "Hala, sige, Tino. Hati tayo," sabi niya sabay abot ng kalahati ng tsokolate.

Pagkalayo ni Tili upang uminom ng tubig, biglang tumayo nang tuwid si Tino at ngumiti. Sa totoo lang, katatapos lang niyang kumain ng pandesal at itlog sa bahay. Masarap na masarap niyang kinain ang tsokolate habang iniisip kung gaano kadaling lokohin si Tili. Nang bumalik si Tili upang bigyan pa sana ng pagkain ang kaklase ay laking gulat nito ng maglabas ng tatlong tinapay mula sa bag nitong dala si Tino. Walang nagawa si Tili kundi yumuko na lamang.

Kinabukasan, nakita ni Tino si Tilku na naglalaro ng holen sa likod ng silid-aralan. May isang malaking asul na holen si Tilku na kumikislap sa araw. Nagustuhan ito ni Tino. Kasabay ng pagkislap ng holen ng kaklase ay ang pagkikislap din ng kanyang mga mata habang pinagnanasaan ito.

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"Tilku," tawag ni Tino, "alam mo ba na espesyal itong holen ko? Sabi ng pinsan ko, swerte raw ito. Kapag ito ang gamit mo, panalo ka lagi."

Napatingin si Tilku sa maliit na berdeng holen ni Tino. "Talaga? Mukhang ordinaryo lang naman."

"Hindi mo lang alam," sagot ni Tino. "Pero dahil kaibigan kita, ipagpapalit ko na sa'yo."

Dahil gusto ni Tilku na manalo sa laro, pumayag siya. Ibinigay niya ang malaking asul na holen at kinuha ang berdeng holen ni Tino. Nang magsimula ang laro, agad natalo si Tilku. Samantalang si Tino, hawak ang malaking asul na holen, ay nakangiting naglakad palayo. Naiyak na lamang si Tilku habang pinagmamasdan ito.

Sa ikatlong pagkakataon, si Widut naman ang kanyang napagdiskitahan. Mahilig magkulay si Widut at may dala siyang bagong kahon ng makukulay na krayola, may ginto at pilak pa. Lumapit si Tino at nagsabing, "Pwede bang makahiram? Kulang ang kulay ko para sa proyekto."

Pumayag si Widut. Ngunit nang ibalik ni Tino ang kahon, dalawa na ang kulang. "Siguro nalaglag," kibit-balikat niyang sabi. Nalungkot si Widut ngunit wala na siyang nagawa.

Lumipas ang ilang araw at may dumating na bagong estudyante sa kanilang klase. Ang pangalan niya ay Bati. Tahimik siya ngunit mapagmasid. Madalas lamang siyang nakaupo sa sulok habang nagbabasa o nakangiting pinagmamasdan ang mga kaklase.

Isang tanghali, napansin ni Tino ang maayos na pagkakabalot ng baon ni Bati. "Mukhang masarap 'yan," bulong niya sa sarili. Lumapit siya at nagsimulang magkuwento tungkol sa kanyang espesyal na sandwich.

"Bati, gusto mo bang makipagpalit? Masarap itong sa akin. May palamang manok at keso," sabi niya.

Ngumiti si Bati. "Sige," mahinahon niyang tugon.

Agad na nagpalitan ang dalawa. Sabik na kumagat si Tino sa sandwich ni Bati—ngunit napangiwi siya. Puro gulay pala iyon: pipino, kamatis, at litsugas. Hindi niya gusto ang lasa.

Samantala, masayang kumakain si Bati ng sandwich ni Tino. "Masarap pala ito," sabi niya.

Nagtataka si Tino. "Hindi mo ba gusto ang sandwich mo?"

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"Gusto," sagot ni Bati, "pero alam kong hindi mo gusto ang gulay. Nakita kitang itinatabi ang gulay sa plato mo kahapon."

Natahimik si Tino. "Alam mo ba ang ginagawa ko?" tanong niya.

"Oo," sagot ni Bati. "Narinig ko rin ang tungkol sa tsokolate, sa holen, at sa krayola. Gusto ko lang iparamdam sa'yo kung ano ang pakiramdam."

Biglang bumigat ang pakiramdam ni Tino. Ngayon niya naramdaman ang hiya at inis na maaaring naramdaman nina Tili, Tilku, at Widut. Hindi pala masaya kapag ikaw ang naloko.

Tahimik siyang umupo. Hindi siya pinagtawanan ni Bati. Sa halip, inalok siya nito ng kalahati ng sandwich. "Pwede pa naman tayong maging magkaibigan," sabi ni Bati.

Kinabukasan, nilapitan ni Tino sina Tili, Tilku, at Widut. Isa-isa siyang humingi ng tawad at ibinalik ang dapat ibalik, isang bagong kahon ng krayola, isang holen, at tsokolate.

Mula noon, ginamit na ni Tino ang kanyang talino sa pagtulong sa kaklase. Natutunan niyang mas masarap palang manalo nang patas. At doon nagsimula ang pagbabago ng batang dating tuso, dahil minsan, kailangan mong maranasan ang iyong sariling gawa upang matutong maging mabuti.

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
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The Quiet Labor of Staying

Within the ward where muted shadows lie,
And sleepless hours through narrow windows creep,
I watched the measured pulse of time pass by,
While others sought the healing gift of sleep.

The chair underneath me, plain, bare and hard;
And raised a tutor in enduring grace;
It gave no comfort, no restoration,
But taught him persistence in the station.

Around the room, the restless monitors
Composed their songs in intermittent tone;
Their coded rhythms marked uncertain shores
Where fear and hope were seldom left alone

From time to time a cry broke through the silence,
Showing agony that no word could disguise;
Its echo remained with a somber care,
A wound that even quiet seemed to know.

Beyond those walls, the world pursued its way,
Oblivious to the vigil of the night;
While countless homes surrendered to the day,
We dwelt between endurance and first light.

Then, as the waiting grew deeper,
There was a deepening understanding:
That care's not limited to actions of skill,
But exists as presence shared unselfishly.

This truth made the teacher conscious of his secret role
Within the boundaries of the classroom, typically crowded;
For education has a bigger purpose
Than the scores and records will ever tell.

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A teacher learns to read the unspoken,
To hear the terrors that lie behind a voice;
To guide the wavering hearts that dread and shrink,
And enable the student, disheartened, choose.

The silent child struggling to fit in,
The youth whose loads no valuing discloses,
May bear silent wounds disguised for long
Beneath the mask, composure often slips.

Like watchers at the side of a hospital bed,
Teachers remain when easier roads beckon;
With them they stroll with doubting affrighted,
And give their power, when confidence is precious.

Such work rarely finds great acclaim,
Nor is its value measured by metrics or review;
But lives are changed in its steady blaze,
and futures conceived in kindness carried through.

For learning thrives where human links remain,
Where education is caring because of trust;
Where true and sure, is patient hearts,
And mindful of the load that others endure.

This morality can be well described by scholar,
The thinker would trace its principles with art;
But practice has a truth to communicate each day:
Education comes first in the heart.

So, dawn broke on the windowpane,
And put out the night's dark reign;
The chair was there, but I was not the same,
For silent duty has a permanent claim.

And so, in schools, in homes, in wards of pain,
Where fragile lives confront what they must face,
The ones who choose to stay through loss or gain
Reveal humanity's most faithful grace.

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Mac Taner T. Almazan, PhD
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Region 1, Philippines
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The Silent Work of Remaining: Thoughts on Care, Presence and the Invisible Work of Educators

There are forms of labor that are immediately visible through measurable outputs, reports, and performance indicators. However, some of the most meaningful work remains largely invisible, not because it lacks value, but because it resists quantification. Among these is the quiet work of remaining present for another person through moments of uncertainty, vulnerability, and difficulty.

I came to understand this while serving as a patient's watcher during a hospital confinement. On the surface, the role seemed simple: sitting beside a hospital bed through long hours, listening to the rhythm of machines, and waiting. However, beneath this simplicity lay an important realization: caring is often expressed not through constant activity but through steadfast presence. Sometimes, the most meaningful way to help is to stay.

Hospital nights unfold differently. Time stretches as footsteps, alarms, whispered conversations, and occasional cries interrupt the silence. The watcher learns to remain attentive, not because there is always something to do, but because someone may need them at any moment. This quiet vigilance led me to reflect on another profession sustained by a similar form of attentiveness, the classroom.

Like watchers, teachers spend much of their professional lives attending to others. They track indicators of learning, signals of motivation, signs of worry and emotional well-being, not physiological signs. They see the student who falls silent, the learner whose attendance starts to drop, the child whose academic performance hides personal issues or the university student quietly carrying financial, emotional or psychological weights. Much of this attention takes place outside the formal curriculum. Lesson plans, grading sheets, and institutional reports hardly reflect it, although it is crucial to the educational process.

Educators in both basic and higher education are frequently called upon to assume many tasks concurrently. They are instructors, mentors, advisers, counselors, organizers, and advocates. They carry the responsibility of facilitating learning while also responding to the increasingly complex realities that students bring into educational spaces. Like the patient's watcher, teachers frequently occupy an in-between position, not entirely responsible for

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solving every problem, yet unable to remain indifferent to the struggles unfolding before them.

The physical discomfort of the hospital chair became a metaphor for the conditions under which many educators work. The chair is not designed for comfort; it is designed for staying. Similarly, many educational systems are not always structured to support the emotional demands placed upon teachers. Educators often continue despite heavy workloads, administrative requirements, limited resources, and growing expectations. They remain because students continue to need them.

What makes this labor particularly challenging is its invisibility. Educational discourse frequently highlights measurable outcomes such as examination results, research productivity, graduation rates, and institutional rankings. These indicators are important, yet they rarely capture the quieter dimensions of teaching. They do not measure the conversations held after class with a struggling learner. They do not account for the emotional energy invested in encouraging a student on the verge of giving up. They cannot easily quantify the patience required to teach the same concept repeatedly until understanding emerges.

The hospital night also revealed the emotional weight of witnessing vulnerability. There were moments when patients expressed pain openly and unexpectedly. In those moments, there was little that could be done except remain present. Teaching often presents similar encounters. Educators become witnesses to various forms of student vulnerability: academic failure, family difficulties, mental health challenges, economic hardship, and uncertainty about the future. While teachers may not always possess the power to eliminate these difficulties, their presence often becomes a source of stability.

This understanding is consistent with the ethics of care, which are gaining prominence in educational studies. Learning does not only happen by transferring knowledge. It also happens in relationships of trust, attention, empathy, and human connection. Students sometimes recall not only what their teachers taught them but how their teachers made them feel at important points in their lives. In this way, education is more than teaching; it becomes an act of walking with others in their journeys of development.

This concept is especially important for teacher educators. Pre-service teachers are usually taught pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment methods, and classroom management. These are key talents. Equally crucial is fostering an appreciation of teaching as relational activity. Future educators need to understand that good teaching is not just about presenting content. It involves the capacity to be present with doubt, to hold learners in struggle, and to hold hope when progress seems slow.

As dawn entered the hospital room, the experience did not conclude with a sense of accomplishment. There was no dramatic resolution. Instead, there was a quiet recognition that care often leaves no visible record. The night passed. The chair remained. Life continued.

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Teaching unfolds much the same way. Much of what educators contribute happens beyond public recognition, shaping learners gradually through everyday acts of presence, patience, and care. Serving as a patient's watcher revealed that both caregiving and teaching require the willingness to remain present even when outcomes are uncertain.

The peaceful work of remaining echoes what educational philosopher Nel Noddings called an ethic of caring, whereby real education is anchored not just in intellectual progress, but also in attentive concern for the needs and humanity of others. Similarly, Parker J. Palmer reminds teachers that successful teaching develops from the teacher's own personality and integrity, demonstrated via genuine interactions rather than the mere transfer of knowledge. From these vantage points, the invisible acts of presence, patience, and accompaniment that lie at the core of both caregiving and teaching are not marginal to professional practice. They are at the core of the practice. In classrooms and communities, educators continue to change lives not only by what they teach, but by their commitment to stay put when learners need them most.

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+639543906965



Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
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A Feast on a Budget

The worn-out ₱500 bill felt like a single, heavy stone in Maya's pocket. She had planned the perfect surprise: a special dinner for her mother, a small "thank you" for all the double shifts she worked. But looking at the crisp bill and then at the grocery store shelves, her heart sank. A single pre-cooked roasted chicken cost ₱350. That was out of the question.

"Okay, Maya," she whispered to herself, channeling the voice of her TLE teacher, Ms. Santos. "What would you do in a Home Economics lab?"

She pulled out her phone and opened her notes app, where she had jotted down lesson summaries. One phrase stood out: "Budgeting is not about restriction; it is about prioritization."

Instead of buying convenience, she bought potential. For ₱200, she bought a whole kilo of chicken legs. For ₱100, she bought a bag of rice, a head of garlic, a few tomatoes, and a small bottle of soy sauce. For ₱50, she got a bunch of kangkong (water spinach). She had ₱150 left for a special dessert. She saw a bag of ripe bananas and remembered a simple recipe: Banana Turon. She bought the bananas, some brown sugar, and spring roll wrappers.

Back in their small kitchen, Maya transformed. She marinated the chicken in soy sauce, garlic, and a pinch of sugar. Instead of frying it, she decided to simmer it into a rich, savory Chicken Adobo, a dish that tasted like it took hours but was simple to prepare.

A crisis struck when she realized the gas tank was almost empty. "TLE tip number 2," she thought, "improvise." She couldn't waste time. She used a small electric rice cooker to cook the rice and then steamed the kangkong on top of it while the rice was cooking. It was a trick she'd learned when they had a "survival cooking" activity in class.

The door clicked open. Her mom looked tired, her shoulders slumped. She stopped in her tracks, her eyes wide. The small kitchen table was covered with a clean cloth. On it were three plates. A mound of fluffy rice, a generous serving of the glossy, dark chicken adobo, and a side of bright green steamed kangkong. For dessert, the golden-brown Turon sat on a plate, smelling of caramelized sugar.

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+639543906965

"Maya... what is all this?" her mom asked, her voice barely a whisper.

"Happy Surprise Tuesday, Ma," Maya said, hugging her tight. "It's not much, but I made it all myself. I only used ₱500. I learned it in TLE.

" Her mother pulled her into another hug, this time with tears in her eyes. "This is more than a feast, Maya. This is resourcefulness. This is love.

" As they ate, the flavors were simple, but the feeling was rich. Maya learned that day that Home Economics wasn't just a class. It was the art of turning the little you have into something that feels like a treasure.

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Butuan City, Philippines
+639543906965



Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21130852

Industrial Arts Education in the Era of Industry 4.0

The fourth Industrial Revolution has transformed the way people live, work, and learn. Automation, artificial intelligence, and digital technologies continue to reshape industries, making it essential for education to evolve alongside these changes. In this new landscape, industrial Arts education plays a vital role in preparing learners for the demands of the future.

Industrial Arts is no longer limited to teaching the proper use of tools and equipment. It now encourages learners to think creatively, solve problems efficiently, and adapt to technological advancement. Every project completed inside the classroom develops discipline, precision, and confidence- qualities that employers and entrepreneurs' value alike.

Technology should not replace craftsmanship; instead, it should enhance it. Learners who understand both traditional skills and modern innovations become better equipped to respond to changing workplace demands. Whether designing products, repairing equipment, or managing digital fabrication tools, they contribute to a workplace that values quality and innovation.

Teachers serve as catalysts for this transformation. By integrating emerging technologies into practical lessons while preserving the values of hard work, safety, and responsibility, they prepare students for careers that may not even exist today.

Industrial Arts Education remains a bridge between knowledge and opportunity. As industries continue to evolve, education must empower learners with skills that are not only relevant today but also adaptable for tomorrow. Through innovation, resilience, and lifelong learning, Filipino students can confidently face the future of work.

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+639543906965



Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21131524

Innovation in EPP and Entrepreneurship Education

Innovation begins with curiosity. In every EPP and Entrepreneurship classroom, students discover that learning extends beyond theories and textbooks. They explore ideas, create solutions, and develop confidence to transform simple opportunities into meaningful ventures.

Entrepreneurship education encourages learners to become proactive rather than passive. Instead of waiting for opportunities, they learn to create them. This mindset inspires creativity, resilience, and responsibility qualities that remain valuable regardless of career choice.

Teachers play an essential role in cultivating innovation. Through project-based learning, collaborative activities, and real-world applications, students experience how knowledge becomes practical action. They realize that every successful enterprise begins with a willingness to learn and improve.

Innovation is not always about sophisticated technology. Sometimes, it begins with simple ideas that address every challenge. By nurturing entrepreneurial thinking, education empowers learners to become future innovators who contribute to economic growth and community development.

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+639543906965



Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21131976

Teaching EPP with Entrepreneurship: Inspiring Young Minds Create Opportunities

Education becomes more meaningful when learners discover that knowledge can transform their lives. In Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (EPP) with entrepreneurship, students learn more than practical skills-they develop the confidence to become creative thinkers, responsible decision-makers, and future entrepreneurs.

Teaching EPP with an entrepreneurial focus goes beyond introducing business concepts. It encourages learners to recognize opportunities in their surroundings, maximize available resources, and create products or services that respond to community needs. Every classroom activity, from preparing simple business plans to marketing student-made products, nurtures innovation, teamwork, and perseverance.

The classroom becomes a place where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, and every challenge inspires improvement. Through hands-on experiences, learners understand that success is built through hard work, discipline, and determination. These lessons prepare them not only for future careers but also for everyday life.

As educators, we are responsible for inspiring learners to dream beyond limitations. By integrating entrepreneurship into EPP, we empower students to become problem-solvers who value honesty, creativity, and service to others. We encourage them to believe that even small ideas, when supported by dedication and purpose, can grow into meaningful achievements.

Teaching EPP with an entrepreneurial focus is ultimately about building hope. It equips learners with practical competencies while shaping their character and resilience. In a rapidly changing world, these qualities become valuable assets that enable them to adapt, innovate, and contribute positively to society. Every lesson taught today becomes a seed of opportunity that may one day blossom into a successful enterprise and a brighter future for Filipino learners.

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Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21132204

Growing Success from the Ground Up

Agricultural and Fishery Arts teaches students that nature is one of life's greatest classrooms. This component of Technology and Livelihood Education develops knowledge and skills in crop production, animal raising, fisheries, and sustainable farming practices. It highlights the importance of agriculture in ensuring food security and protecting the environment.

Students learn that farming is more than planting seeds- it requires patience, scientific knowledge, and responsible resource management. They discover how proper care of plants, animals, and aquatic resources contributes to healthy communities and economic development.

AFA also promotes environmental awareness by encouraging sustainable practices that conserve natural resources for future generations. Through practical activities, learners appreciate the value of hard work and understand the important role of farmers and fisherfolk in society.

Moreover, this component inspires young people to consider careers in agriculture and agribusiness. Fishery Arts cultivates not only crops but also responsibility, perseverance, and appreciation for nature. It reminds students that every harvest begins with dedication, making agriculture a meaningful pathway toward sustainable development and lifelong success.

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May Rose A. Espia – Macrohon, PhD
Assistant Professor III
South Cotabato State College
South Cotabato, Region XII, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21133618

Why do Students Struggle with Math?

Mathematics has been considered one of the most challenging subjects for elementary and secondary students worldwide. In the Philippines, this struggle is evident in the results of the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), where the country ranked at the bottom in Math. For many students, the numbers and formulas in Math were so abstract and unrelated to their daily lives that they felt intimidating rather than empowering. Mathematics teachers, on the other hand, carry the burden of not only teaching the subject but also helping students overcome their fear, anxiety, and negative attitude towards math. As teachers, we need to understand why our students struggle with mathematics. This is crucial, as it will not only highlight weaknesses but also identify possible solutions to make math more meaningful and enjoyable.

After recognizing the challenges highlighted by international assessment results, it is important to look beyond the statistics and into the reality in Filipino classrooms. The numbers alone cannot explain why many students fear math. To truly understand the struggle, we also need to consider the practical reasons for poor performance that stem from classroom experience, teaching methods, and student attitudes.

One of the most practical reasons students struggle with mathematics is the lack of a strong foundation in basic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. These skills serve as the building blocks for more advanced concepts. If only these fundamental operations were mastered at an early age, more advanced topics like algebra and statistics would not be overwhelming for learners. Learners also struggle with the sheer number of formulas they need to memorize without even understanding how and why they work, which makes it difficult for them to apply them to real–life problems.

Beyond the challenge of mastering the basic operations and understanding the formulas, another difficulty lies in the medium of instruction used in teaching mathematics. Books, modules, and examinations are written in English. Learners are more comfortable in Filipino or even in their own dialect. As a result, they struggle to understand mathematical concepts. This language gap often forces students to focus not only on solving problems but also on understanding or interpreting instructions, which further complicates the task. As a result, learners often know how to compute but fail to answer correctly because they misunderstood the question.

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Aside from the language barrier, learners also have an emotional barrier that hinders their learning. They often feel fear of making mistakes, which discourages them from participating in class activities and prevents them from building confidence in solving problems. They feel embarrassed in front of their peers or corrected by their teachers every time they make mistakes. This hesitation leads them to become quiet and passive in the classroom, depriving them of the opportunity to improve their skills. In the long run, the fear of making mistakes develops into a cycle: learners will avoid math tasks, their skills continue to weaken, and their anxiety grows.

Even when learners overcome their anxiety in Math, many still struggle with the nature of Mathematics itself. Topics like Algebra, Geometry, and Probability often seem abstract, making it difficult for learners to connect them to their daily lives. Without clear examples of how these concepts can be applied to their everyday living, they will lose interest and motivation. The gap between the abstract ideas and the practical applications of math often leads to frustration.

In addition to the abstract nature of math, the classroom itself contributes to the difficulties students face. Teachers often handle classes with at least 40 students, a number that makes it nearly impossible to provide individual attention, especially to those who are struggling. In crowded settings, learners who need extra guidance are often overlooked because teachers focus on covering the lessons rather than addressing individual learning gaps. This lack of support for weaker students would reinforce their perception that Math is really a difficult subject. Large class sizes also limit opportunities for interactive activities, problem-solving exercises, and meaningful feedback, which are essential for building confidence and mastery in mathematics.

Hence, the struggles of Filipino students in mathematics are not simply the result of individual weaknesses but are shaped by a combination of foundational gaps, language barriers, emotional challenges, abstract concepts, and structural issues such as large class sizes. These factors collectively create an environment where math feels intimidating rather than empowering. However, recognizing these challenges is the first step toward meaningful change. By strengthening basic skills, contextualizing lessons in familiar language, fostering supportive classrooms that embrace mistakes as part of learning, connecting abstract ideas to real-life applications, and addressing systemic concerns in class size and resources, we can transform mathematics from a source of fear into a subject of discovery. Ultimately, the goal is not only to improve test scores but to help learners see math as a valuable tool for problem-solving and success in everyday life.

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Erwin B. Tantay, PhD, EdD
Instructor I, Pangasinan State University
Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21185959

The Cause of the Fall

The poor performance of Filipino learners in PISA science reflects deeper issues than test preparation alone. Science learning is affected by what students bring to school, what happens inside the classroom, and how the education system supports instruction. When these factors work against one another, students struggle to develop the scientific literacy needed for international assessments and real-life problem solving.

One major cause is the socioeconomic condition of many learners. Students from low-income households often face limited access to books, learning materials, nutritious meals, stable study spaces, and academic support, all of which can reduce their readiness for science learning. These conditions make it harder for learners to engage with abstract concepts, conduct experiments, and sustain attention in class.

A second cause is weak language proficiency, especially in understanding English-based science texts and test items. Since science often uses technical vocabulary and complex reading tasks, learners who have difficulty in English may understand the content poorly even when they know some of the concepts. This creates a double burden: students must learn science content while also decoding the language used to present it.

Teacher quality and instructional practice also matter. The shortage of well-prepared science teachers, limited professional development, and traditional lecture-based teaching reduce the quality of science instruction. When teachers have insufficient training in inquiry-based and learner-centered approaches, students are less likely to develop higher-order thinking skills, experimental habits, and confidence in problem-solving.

Resource deficiencies in schools further weaken performance. Many schools lack updated laboratories, science equipment, digital tools, and sufficient classroom materials needed for meaningful science learning. Without hands-on experience, science becomes memorization-heavy rather than exploratory and applied, which limits students' understanding and motivation.

Curriculum misalignment is another important issue. While the Philippine curriculum aims to build scientific literacy, there are concerns that its implementation does not always align with the cognitive demands of PISA, which emphasizes analysis, interpretation, and the

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+639543906965

application of knowledge in unfamiliar contexts. If classroom tasks remain focused on recall rather than reasoning, students may perform poorly when confronted with real-world science problems.

Student motivation and self-efficacy also influence performance. Learners who doubt their ability in science or see the subject as irrelevant may invest less effort and persistence. This is especially concerning in science, where confidence, curiosity, and sustained practice help students master concepts and investigative skills.

For teachers, the issue calls for more than content delivery. Science lessons should be contextualized, language-supported, and rooted in inquiry, experimentation, and problem solving. Teachers can help by using local examples, simplifying technical language without weakening concepts, and providing frequent formative assessment.

Teachers also need to strengthen student confidence through guided practice, collaborative activities, and performance tasks that develop both knowledge and skills. When learners experience success in science through active engagement, they become more motivated and better prepared for PISA-type tasks.

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Erwin B. Tantay, PhD, EdD
Instructor I, Pangasinan State University
Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan
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Engage through online Science Resources

Online science resources are now essential tools for teachers who want to make lessons more engaging, inclusive, and responsive to learner needs. In the context of the DepEd ARAL Program, these resources are especially valuable because they support learning recovery, strengthen foundational skills, and provide teachers with flexible ways to address gaps in understanding of science. For many Filipino learners, science becomes more meaningful when it is presented through visuals, simulations, short videos, and guided online activities that connect concepts to real-life situations.

Science is not only a subject of facts and definitions; it is a subject of observation, inquiry, and problem-solving. Online resources help teachers demonstrate scientific ideas that are difficult to show through lecture alone, such as microscopic processes, planetary motion, chemical reactions, or ecosystem change. They also allow learners to revisit lessons at their own pace, which is important in ARAL settings where students may need remediation, reinforcement, or additional guided practice.

For teachers, these resources reduce the pressure of preparing everything from scratch. They provide ready-made materials that can be adapted to the class context, learners' levels, and available time. When selected carefully, online tools can help teachers shift from purely teacher-centered instruction to a more active learning environment that encourages students to ask questions, test ideas, and explain phenomena.

The ARAL Program emphasizes accessible learning and recovery for learners who need extra support, and online science resources fit well within that goal. In science, many learners struggle not because they cannot learn, but because they need more opportunities to see, practice, and apply concepts. Digital tools such as virtual labs, interactive quizzes, short explainer videos, and concept animations can provide that support in a manageable way.

Online resources are also useful for differentiated instruction. A teacher can assign simpler review tasks to struggling learners while giving enrichment tasks to more advanced students, all from the same online platform or set of materials. This flexibility supports ARAL's aim of helping learners recover at their own pace without being left behind.

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Teachers may also use free science lesson repositories and curated educational sites that provide age-appropriate experiments, readings, and activities. These tools are most effective when matched with clear learning objectives and when teachers verify that the content is accurate, safe, and aligned with the curriculum. In ARAL, the best resources are those that simplify learning without oversimplifying the science.

Effective use of online science resources begins with careful planning. Teachers should select one clear concept, choose a digital resource that supports it, and prepare guiding questions that focus learners' attention. For example, if the lesson is about the water cycle, a short animation can be followed by a quick reflection activity, a concept map, or a peer discussion. This prevents students from passively watching and instead pushes them to think scientifically.

Teachers should also connect online content to familiar examples. In the Philippine setting, lessons can be linked to weather patterns, agriculture, energy use, health, or local environmental issues. This makes science more relevant and supports ARAL's goal of accessible learning through context-based instruction. When learners see science in everyday life, motivation tends to improve.

Teachers also play a central role in turning digital access into real learning. A resource becomes effective when the teacher frames it well, monitors understanding, and follows it with discussion or practice. In this sense, online materials do not replace the teacher; they extend the teacher's ability to support learners more carefully and creatively.

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Erwin B. Tantay, PhD, EdD
Instructor I, Pangasinan State University
Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21186342

Overcoming Challenges in Inquiry-Based Science in the Context of the DepEd ARAL Program

Inquiry-based science remains one of the most effective approaches for developing learners' curiosity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. In the context of the DepEd ARAL Program, however, it must be adapted to meet the realities of learning recovery, uneven learner readiness, and limited instructional time. The challenge for teachers is not to abandon inquiry, but to make it more guided, accessible, and responsive so that it supports both science understanding and academic recovery.

Inquiry-based science encourages learners to observe, ask questions, investigate, and draw conclusions from evidence. These are valuable skills because science is not just about memorizing facts; it is about making sense of phenomena. In ARAL classes, this approach is especially important because learners often need more than review. They need structured experiences that help them rebuild understanding, confidence, and interest in science.

At the same time, many ARAL learners come with learning gaps in reading, vocabulary, numeracy, and prior science knowledge. If inquiry activities are too open-ended, students may become confused or discouraged. For this reason, inquiry in ARAL should be scaffolded carefully. Teachers need to guide learners step by step while still allowing them to think, explore, and explain.

One major challenge is learner readiness. Some students may not fully understand instructions, data tables, or science vocabulary. Others may have low confidence because of repeated academic difficulties. In an inquiry-based lesson, these learners may hesitate to participate unless the teacher provides sufficient support. Without this support, inquiry can become frustrating rather than empowering.

Another challenge is time. Inquiry lessons often require observation, discussion, recording, analysis, and reflection. In ARAL, teachers must also address missed competencies and foundational skills. This can make science lessons feel rushed. If time is limited, teachers may return to lecture-based instruction to cover more content, even if that approach is less effective for long-term understanding.

Resources are also a concern. Many schools have limited laboratory materials, internet access, or classroom equipment. However, inquiry-based science often depends on hands-on

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activities. When materials are unavailable, teachers may feel that inquiry is impossible. However, inquiry can still occur with simple, low-cost, locally available materials if lessons are thoughtfully designed.

A practical response is to use guided inquiry instead of fully open inquiry. Guided inquiry gives learners a clear question, a set of steps, and prompts that lead them through the process. This is especially useful in ARAL because it preserves the spirit of investigation while giving learners enough structure to succeed. Teachers can gradually reduce support as students become more confident.

For example, instead of asking learners to design a full experiment from scratch, the teacher can provide the problem, materials, and recording sheet. Learners then make predictions, observe outcomes, and explain what happened. This approach helps them experience scientific thinking without becoming overwhelmed. It also allows the teacher to focus on the specific skills that need to be recovered.

Language support is essential in inquiry-based science. Since many learners struggle with reading and technical vocabulary, teachers should simplify directions without reducing the scientific meaning. Visual aids, demonstrations, sentence frames, and oral explanations can make tasks easier to understand. When students understand the language of inquiry, they are more likely to participate actively.

Teachers should also pre-teach key words and concepts before the activity begins. This helps learners focus on the investigation rather than getting stuck on unfamiliar terms. During the lesson, the teacher can ask short guiding questions such as “What do you notice?”, “What changed?”, and “Why do you think this happened?” These questions keep the focus on reasoning and evidence.

Overcoming challenges in inquiry-based science within the DepEd ARAL Program is possible when teachers employ guided, practical, and learner-centered strategies. Inquiry should not be seen as too difficult for recovery classes. Instead, it should be reshaped to fit the needs of struggling learners while still developing scientific habits of mind. When teachers combine structure, relevance, language support, and encouragement, inquiry becomes a powerful path toward recovery, confidence, and deeper science learning.

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+639543906965



Jeferson A. Austria, MAEd
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21200428

May Nagvi-video Ba?

Alas-kuwatro pa lang ng umaga, umaaso na ang kaldero ni Aling Dely.

Sa bangketa sa tapat ng ospital, siya unang nagbubukas. Isang mesa. Tatlong bangkito. Isang garapon ng chicharon. Isang lata ng barya. Sa gilid, nakasabit ang karton na sinulatan niya ng pentel pen.

LUGAW 25
ITLOG 15
LIBRENG SABAW

Iyon lang ang kaya niyang ilibre. Sabaw. Mainit naman. May luya. May konting asin. Kapag may pasyenteng nagbabantay sa emergency room na nanginginig sa gutom, inuuna niya ang sabaw bago singil.

“Dely, pahingi muna,” sabi ng guard tuwing madaling-araw.

“Sabaw?”
“May kanin?”
“May pera?”

Ngumingiti ang guard. Ngumingiti rin siya. Sa huli, may kalahating sandok pa rin sa plastik.

Ganoon ang takbo ng umaga. Tahimik. Usok. Pawis. Barya.

Hanggang isang Lunes, may binatang lumapit, nakasuot ng itim na jacket kahit mainit. May hawak na cellphone na parang salamin. Kasama nito ang isa pang lalaki na may ilaw na nakatutok sa mukha ni Aling Dely.

“Nay, bibili po kami ng lugaw.”
“Ilan?”
“Isa lang. Pero Nay, may pabor kami.”
Napahinto siya sa pagsalok.

“Content lang po. Natural lang kayo. Kunwari may lalapit na gutom, tapos bibigyan n’yo ng libre. Tapos tatanungin namin kayo kung bakit mabuti ang puso ninyo.”

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Tiningnan niya ang kaldero. Tiningnan ang lata ng barya. Sa loob ng bulsa niya, may resibo ng gamot ng asawa niyang si Rudy. Maintenance sa puso. Dalawang araw nang hati ang iniinom.

"Hindi ako marunong umarte," sabi niya.
"Hindi po arte, Nay. Totoo naman kayo."

May tinawag ang binata mula sa kanto. Isang batang payat, nakauniporme, may bag na halos kasinglaki ng katawan.

"Ito po. Gutom daw siya."
Nakatitig ang bata sa kaldero.
"Kilala n'yo 'yan?" tanong ni Aling Dely.
"Hindi po. Nakita lang namin."
Lumapit ang ilaw. Uminit ang mukha niya.
"Sige na, Nay. Makatutulong din po sa inyo. Lalagay namin GCash n'yo."

Wala siyang GCash. Ang mayroon siya ay lumang cellphone na kailangang hampasin sa likod bago magbukas.

"Wala akong ganoon."
"Ako na po gagawa ng QR."
Hindi niya alam kung ano ang QR, pero tumango siya.

Isinalok niya ang lugaw. Nilagyan ng itlog. Nilagyan ng chicharon. Iyon ang una niyang pagkakamali. Hindi niya iyon ginagawa kahit kanino nang libre.

Umupo ang bata sa bangkito. Kumain nang mabilis. Hindi tumingin sa kamera. Nang maubos, dinilaan pa nito ang gilid ng kutsara.

"Ano pong masasabi ninyo sa kabutihan ni Nanay?" tanong ng binata.
Tumingin ang bata kay Aling Dely.
"Salamat po."
Iyon lang.
Kinabukasan, dumami ang tao sa kariton niya.
"Nay, ikaw 'yong viral!"
"Ang bait n'yo po."
"Nay, libre rin po ba kami?"

May dalagang yumakap sa kaniya bago bumili. May lalaking nagselfie habang sumisipsip ng lugaw. May matandang nag-abot ng limampu at sinabing, "Sukli mo na, Nay. Deserve mo."

Sa hapon, bumalik ang binatang may jacket. May dala itong tarpaulin. Nandoon ang mukha ni Aling Dely, nakangiti habang nagsasandok. Sa tabi, may parisukat na puno ng maliliit na itim na guhit.

"QR n'yo po, Nay. Para sa donations."

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Isinabit nila iyon sa tabi ng karton.
LUGAW 25
ITLOG 15
LIBRENG SABAW
Sa ibaba, nadagdag ang bagong papel.
SUPPORT NANAY DELY

Hindi gusto ni Aling Dely ang salitang support. Parang may nabali sa kaniya na kailangang hawakan ng ibang tao.

Ngunit nang gabing iyon, may pumasok na pera sa numerong hiniram niya sa kapitbahay.

₱150.
₱50.
₱300.
Umuwi siyang may gamot para kay Rudy at isang kilong bigas.
“Kanino galing?” tanong ng asawa niya.
“Sa mga nanood.”
“Ano’ng napanood?”
Hindi siya sumagot.

Sa mga sumunod na araw, hindi na siya unang nagbubukas. May nauuna nang naghihintay. Hindi lahat bumibili. Ang iba, nakatayo lang, hawak ang cellphone.

“Nay, puwede po ba ulit kayo magbigay ng libre? Project lang po.”
“Nay, paiyakin n’yo naman kami.”
“Nay, may kilala po ba kayong mas kawawa?”
May isang babae na nagdala ng batang may sipon. Pinaupo sa bangkito at bumulong, “Anak, sabihin mo hindi ka pa kumakain.”
Narinig iyon ni Aling Dely.
Isinalok niya pa rin ang lugaw.

Sa gabi, binibilang niya ang lugi. Hindi niya masabi kay Rudy. Hindi niya masabi sa sarili. Kapag may kamera, bumibigat ang sandok sa kamay niya. Kapag walang kamera, parang may kulang.

Isang umaga, malakas ang ulan. Kaunti ang tao. Basang-basa ang tarpaulin. Kumupas ang mukha niya roon. Ang QR code, nangingitim sa gilid.

Wala pang benta nang may batang lumapit. Hindi iyon ang bata sa video. Mas maliit. Walang bag. Naka-tsinelas na magkaiba ang pares.

“Nay,” sabi nito. “Puwede pong sabaw?”
Kinuha ni Aling Dely ang sandok.
“May kasama ka?”
Umiling ang bata.
“Nanay mo?”
Umiling ulit.

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"Cellphone?"
Tumingin ito sa kaniya, hindi maintindihan.
"May nagvi-video ba?"
Tahimik ang bata.

Sa kaldero, kumulo ang lugaw. Sa ospital, may ambulansiyang dumating. Sa tarpaulin, nakangiti pa rin ang mukha ni Aling Dely.

Dahan-dahan niyang ibinaba ang sandok.
"Sige," sabi niya. "Dito ka kumain."
Umupo ang bata.
Isinalok niya ang lugaw. Nilagyan niya ng itlog. Nilagyan niya ng chicharon.
Pagkatapos, hinubad niya ang basang tarpaulin at itinupi nang maliit.
Walang nakakita.

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Jeferson A. Austria, MAEd
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
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Isang Bituin

Bago sumikat ang araw, binubura na ni Ramil ang alikabok sa kaniyang delivery bag. Kulay itim iyon dati. Ngayon, kulay kalawang na sa gilid at may tahi sa bandang zipper. Sa harap, halos matanggal na ang pangalan ng app. Ang malinaw na lang ay ang limang puting bituin.

Araw-araw niya iyong nakikita bago sumakay sa motor.
Limang bituin.
Parang pangako.
Sa cellphone, lumabas ang marka niya.
4.61
May pulang babala sa ilalim.
Maintain 4.60 to continue receiving priority bookings.
Napalunok si Ramil.
“Ramil,” tawag ni Tess mula sa kusina. “Magkano pa kailangan?”
“Sa ano?”
“Sa promissory ni Lian.”
Hindi siya sumagot agad. Naghahanap siya ng sagot sa sahig.
“Two thousand pa.”
“Bukas na deadline.”
“Oo.”

Tahimik na hinugasan ni Tess ang baso. Isa lang ang baso, pero matagal bago niya natapos.

Sa kuwarto, natutulog pa si Lian. Nakabukas ang notebook sa tabi ng unan. Sa huling pahina, may ginuhit itong building na mataas at may mga taong nakapila sa labas. Sa itaas, may nakasulat: Pangarap kong trabaho.

Hindi binasa ni Ramil ang nakasunod. Baka hindi niya kayanin.
Lumabas siya bago pa magtanong si Tess.

Unang booking niya, dalawang kape at sandwich sa call center. Mabilis. Ikalawa, dog food sa isang subdivision. Mabigat. Ikatlo, isang cake na may nakatusok na kandilang numero 7.

“Careful po, Kuya,” sabi ng babae sa bakery. “Fondant ’yan.”

Inilagay ni Ramil ang kahon sa bag. Pinatungan niya ng jacket para hindi gumalaw.

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Pagtingin niya sa app, malayo ang drop-off.

₱72
Tinanggap niya.

Sa daan, makapal ang usok. Mainit kahit umaga. Sa stoplight, nakita niya ang sarili sa salamin ng van: helmet na kupas, mata na mapula, bibig na tuyo. Sa tabi niya, may batang nakauniporme sa likod ng tricycle, hawak ang cellphone na basag. Nagtititigan sila sandali.

Tumunog ang cellphone ni Ramil.
Si Tess.
"Nasaan ka?"
"Biyahe."
"Tumawag adviser ni Lian."
"Bakit?"
"Kailangan daw makapagbayad kahit kalahati."
"Mamaya."
"Sigurado?"
"Susubukan."

Ibinaba niya bago pa humaba ang usapan.
Pagdating sa kanto ng drop-off, sarado ang kalsada. May hukay. May dalawang lalaking nakaupo sa hollow blocks, nagkakape.

"Boss, saan daan sa Amethyst Street?"
"Libot ka. Doon sa likod ng palengke."
"Malayo?"
"Kung motor, kaya."

Lumibot siya.

Sa palengke, siksikan ang tao. May nagtitinda ng isda sa gitna ng daan. May batang humihila ng kariton. May motorsiklong ayaw magpadaan. Umusad si Ramil nang dahan-dahan, isang paa sa lupa, isang kamay sa preno.

Naramdaman niyang gumalaw ang bag.
Tumigil siya sa gilid. Binuksan ang zipper.
Nakatagilid ang kahon.
Kinuha niya ito at dahan-dahang ibinalik. May kaunting puting icing na dumikit sa gilid ng karton. Hindi pa sira. Hindi pa, sabi niya sa sarili.

Pagdating niya sa bahay, mataas ang gate. May camera sa itaas. Pinindot niya ang doorbell.

Walang sumagot.
Tinawagan niya ang customer.
Una, ring lang.
Ikalawa, ring lang.
Ikatlo, may sumagot na babae.

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"Kuya, nasaan ka na?"
"Nasa labas na po."
"Ay. Puwede pakibilisan? Kanina pa dapat 'yan."
"May saradong daan po."
"Lahat naman kayo may dahilan."

Hindi nagsalita si Ramil.
"Wait lang, papabuksan ko."

Limang minuto.
Sampu.
Labinlima.
Sa app, lumabas ang pula.
Late delivery.

Pinunasan ni Ramil ang pawis sa leeg. Nakatayo siya sa labas ng gate, hawak ang kahon ng cake na parang sanggol na hindi kanya.

Muling tumawag si Tess.
Hindi niya sinagot.

Bumukas ang maliit na pinto ng gate. Lumabas ang isang kasambahay, nakasimangot.

"Cake?"
"Opo."

Binuksan nito ang kahon sa harap niya.

Nalaglag ang kaunting icing sa gilid. Ang pangalan sa ibabaw, na dapat "Yana," naging "Y na."

"Ay, sira," sabi ng kasambahay.
"Hindi po sira. Natabig lang po nang kaunti."
"Kayo na magsabi kay Ma'am."

Lumabas ang babae, hawak ang cellphone. Nakabukas ang camera.
"Ano 'to, Kuya?"
"Ma'am, pasensya na po. Sarado po kasi ang kalsada at matraffic sa palengke."
"Excuse me, surprise 'yan ng anak ko. Once lang siya mag-seven."

Tumango si Ramil. Hindi niya alam kung anong sagot sa "once lang."
"Ma'am, puwede ko pong ayusin. May tissue po ako."
"Tissue? Sa cake?"

May tumawa sa loob ng bahay. May batang sumilip sa likod ng babae. Nakasuot ito ng magandang damit, may korona sa ulo. Tiningnan nito ang cake. Tiningnan din si Ramil.

"Kaltas n'yo na lang po kung kailangan," sabi niya.
"Hindi pera ang issue rito."

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Alam ni Ramil na pera ang issue. Lagi namang pera ang issue. Kapag wala ka, pasensya ang tawag. Kapag sila ang nawalan, prinsipyo.

Pinapirma siya ng babae sa app. Pagkatapos, nakita niyang bumaba ang rating bago pa siya makaalis.

4.59
Tumigil ang paghinga niya.
Sa ilalim, lumabas ang bagong babala.
Your account is under review.
Tumunog ang cellphone. Si Tess.
Sinagot niya.

"Ramil, nasaan ka na? Nandito na si Lian. Umiiyak."
Hindi siya makapagsalita.
"Ramil?"

Tumingin siya sa gate. Sa loob, kumakanta na sila. Narinig niya ang palakpakan. May sumigaw ng "Make a wish!"

Sa kaniyang screen, walang booking na pumapasok.
"Ramil, sagutin mo ako."

Inangat niya ang tingin sa delivery bag. Sa harap nito, natuklap na ang apat na bituin.
Isa na lang ang naiwan.
Pinahid niya iyon ng hinlalaki.
Hindi natanggal.

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Jeferson A. Austria, MAEd
Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
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Iba sa Larawan

Sa Return Hub, hindi basura ang tawag sa mga bagay na ayaw na ng tao. May mas malilinis na salita para roon: reject, refund, failed quality, customer remorse, disposal. Bawat kahon na dumarating ay may dahilan sa gilid, parang munting lapida ng pagkadismaya.

Iba sa larawan.
Too small.
Too big.
Wrong color.
Amoy bodega.
Found cheaper.

Si Mina ang nagbabasa ng mga dahilan. Hindi niya iyon trabaho noon. Dati, nagtitinda siya ng tela sa palengke at kabisado niya ang kamay ng mamimili: ang namimili talaga, ang humihipo lang, ang walang perang pambili pero gustong hawakan sandali ang maganda. Ngayon, scanner ang hawak niya. Kapag tumunog, saka pa lamang niya puwedeng buksan ang kahon.

"Bilis," sabi ni Arman, ang superbisor. "Hindi nobela 'yan."
Hindi nobela, totoo. Pero may kuwento ang bawat balik.
Isang bestida na may amoy ng pabango. Sinuot, kinuhanan, isinauli.
Isang laruan na wala nang baterya. Ginamit hanggang magsawa ang bata, tapos idinahilan na sira.

Isang pares ng sapatos na may putik sa talampakan. Customer says unused.

Si Mina ang magpapasya kung saan mapupunta ang mga ito. Sa berdeng crate kung puwede pang ibenta. Sa asul kung puwedeng bawasan ang presyo. Sa pula kung dapat sirain.

Ang pulang crate ang pinakamabigat buhatin. Hindi dahil sa laman. Dahil sa alam niyang wala namang kasalanan ang karamihan doon.

Sa bahay, may sariling return policy si Mina. Hindi puwedeng magsauli ng bigas kapag naisubo na. Hindi puwedeng mag-refund ng kuryente kapag nagamit na sa bentilador. Hindi puwedeng sabihing iba sa larawan ang buhay kahit araw-araw itong hindi tumutugma sa pinangako.

"Ma," sabi ni Lyka isang gabi, "kailangan ko ng closed shoes."
"Kailan?"

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"Bukas."
"Bakit bukas mo lang sinabi?"
"Ngayon lang sinabi sa amin. Deployment daw sa hotel."

Si Lyka ay nasa senior high, TVL. Pinag-aralan nitong magtiklop ng napkin na parang ibon, ngumiti kahit pinapagalitan, at magsabing "Good morning, Ma'am" sa tinig na hindi halatang kabado. Sa OJT form niya, may pirma na si Mina bilang guardian. Sa requirements, may bilog ang salitang shoes.

Black. Plain. No rubber slippers.
"May sapatos ka pa noong moving-up," sabi ni Mina.
"Maliit na."
"Subukan mo."
Isinuot ni Lyka ang lumang sapatos. Hindi pa napapasok ang kalahati ng paa, namula na ang sakong.
"Kakayanin," sabi ni Mina.

Hindi sumagot ang anak. Iyon ang mas mahirap sa iyak. Ang batang hindi na umiiyak dahil alam na niyang wala ring magagawa ang ingay.

Kinabukasan, sa Return Hub, bumukas kay Mina ang isang kahon na binalot pa sa orihinal na papel. Itim na sapatos. Plain. Walang gasgas. Size 7.

Dahilan: mukhang mura.
Tiningnan niya ang talampakan. Malinis. Tiningnan ang loob. May nakasuksok pang papel para hindi malukot ang hugis.
Tinawag niya si Arman.
"Sir, puwede 'to sa green."
Sinilip nito ang screen.
"Customer tagged as poor quality. Blue."
"Wala namang sira."
"Blue."
Tumango si Mina. Inilagay niya sa asul na crate.
Pagkatapos ng tanghalian, bumalik ang sapatos sa mesa niya. May bagong sticker.
Disposal.
"Bakit pula na?" tanong niya.
"Seller dispute. Mas mahal shipping pabalik kaysa item. Destroy."

Nasa kamay niya ang cutter. Maliit. Dilaw ang hawakan. Binigay iyon sa kanila noong unang araw, kasabay ng paalala na bawal mag-uwi ng kahit ano. Kahit itatapon. Kahit sira. Kahit gutay na. Lahat ng bagay sa bodega ay may may-ari hanggang sirain ng kompanya.

"Picture muna bago cut," sabi ni Arman.

Kinuha ni Mina ang sapatos. Inilapag sa puting mesa. Kinuhaan ng larawan. Harap. Gilid. Talampakan.

Pagkatapos, inilapit niya ang cutter.

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Hindi niya alam kung bakit kamay niya ang unang nanghina. Hindi puso. Hindi konsensiya. Kamay. Ang kamay na sanay maghiwa ng tela, magbilang ng sukli, maglaba ng medyas, magpahid ng Vicks sa dibdib ng anak.

Gumuhit siya ng maliit na hiwa sa loob ng kahon.
Hindi sa sapatos.

Mabilis niyang isinara ang takip. Itinulak ang kahon sa ilalim ng mesa. Pag-shift change, isiniksik niya ang sapatos sa loob ng kaniyang lunch bag, sa ilalim ng lalagyan ng kanin na walang laman.

Sa labas ng bodega, umulan. Hindi malakas. Iyong klaseng ulan na sapat para lumambot ang karton at magmukhang kawawa ang kahit anong hawak mo.

Pag-uwi niya, ibinigay niya ang sapatos kay Lyka.
“Galing saan?”
“Sale.”
“Magkano?”
“Mura.”

Isinuot ng anak ang sapatos. Sakto. Tumayo ito sa harap ng salamin na may bitak sa gitna. Sa bitak, nahati ang katawan niya: isang Lyka sa kaliwa, isang Lyka sa kanan. Parehong naka-itim na sapatos. Parehong hindi makapaniwala.

“Maganda ba?” tanong nito.
“Plain lang dapat, di ba?”

Tumango si Lyka. Umikot siya nang kaunti. Hindi ngumiti nang malaki, pero nawala ang bigat sa balikat.

Kinabukasan, bago pumasok si Mina, dumaan muna siya sa hotel kung saan naka-deploy ang anak. Mula sa labas, nakita niya si Lyka sa lobby. Nakapila kasama ng ibang estudyante, pare-pareho ang puting blouse, itim na palda, nakapusod ang buhok. May lalaking manager na dumaraan sa harap nila, tinitingnan ang kuko, kwelyo, medyas, sapatos.

Tumigil ito kay Lyka.
May sinabi.
Yumuko ang anak.

Mula sa kinatatayuan ni Mina, hindi niya marinig. Nakita lang niya ang dahan-dahang pag-atras ng paa ni Lyka, na para bang puwedeng itago ang sapatos sa ilalim ng sariling katawan.

Pagdating niya sa bodega, naghihintay si Arman sa mesa.
“Mina.”
Alam na niya.

Sa monitor, bukas ang larawan ng sapatos. Harap. Gilid. Talampakan. May kahong walang hiwa. May time stamp. May pangalan niya.

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"Inventory mismatch," sabi ni Arman. "Alam mo ang policy."
Hindi siya nagsalita.
"Babayaran mo retail price. Or termination."
"Sir, itatapon na."
"Hindi iyon ang issue."

Alam ni Mina na iyon ang issue. Lagi namang iyon ang issue. May bagay na puwedeng sirain pero hindi puwedeng gamitin. May taong puwedeng magutom pero hindi puwedeng kumuha. May sapatos na walang halaga hanggang isuot ng maling paa.

"Magkano?" tanong niya.
Tiningnan ni Arman ang screen.
"₱1,299."
Halos isang linggo niyang sahod.
Sa hapon, tinawagan siya ni Lyka.
"Ma, nasaan ka?"
"Trabaho."
"Pinauwi ako."
"Bakit?"
"Hindi raw hotel standard."
"Ang alin?"
Hindi agad sumagot ang anak.
"Yong sapatos. Mukhang mura raw."
Sa kabilang linya, may busina. May ulan. May hiningang pinipigil.
"Umuwi ka na," sabi ni Mina.
"Ma, sorry."
"Umuwi ka na."

Bumalik si Mina sa mesa niya. May bagong kahon sa harap. Binuksan niya. Bestida. Kulay asul. May tag pa. Sa sticker, nakasulat ang dahilan.

Iba sa larawan.
Kinuha niya ang scanner.
Tumunog.
Sa screen, lumabas ang tatlong pagpipilian.
Restock.
Discount.
Destroy.

Matagal nakatitig si Mina sa mga salita. Pagkatapos, ipinasok niya ang bestida sa pulang crate
.
Hindi dahil sira.

Dahil alam niyang may mga bagay na hindi dapat bumalik sa mundo nang walang bahid.

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Instructor
Pangasinan State University - Bayambang Campus
Bayambang, Pangasinan, Philippines
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2 x 2

Sa amin dinadala ng tao ang mukha nilang hindi pumasa.

Masyadong maitim. Masyadong puyat. Masyadong halata ang peklat. Masyadong nakangiti. Masyadong hindi nakangiti. May nunal sa maling lugar. May kulubot na wala raw noong isang taon. May ngiping ayaw makita ng opisina.

"Pakiayos, Ate," sabi nila.
Kaya inaayos ko.

Ang pangalan ng puwesto ko ay Araw-Araw Photo. Nasa gilid ng palengke, katabi ng bilihan ng piyesa ng electric fan at tindahan ng school supplies na laging may nakasabit na medalya. Sa amin nagpapagawa ng ID picture ang mga estudyante, aplikante, seaman, cashier, guard, tutor, caregiver, rider, at mga taong kailangang patunayang sila ang sila.

May presyo ang bawat anyo.
2 x 2, 80.
Passport size, 100.
With coat, add 20.
Retouch, libre kung kaunti lang.
Kaunti lang ang tawag ko sa lahat.

Kaunti lang ang tagihawat. Kaunti lang ang eyebag. Kaunti lang ang taba sa pisngi. Kaunti lang ang lungkot sa mata. Sa computer, isang hila lang ng mouse, nababago ang pagod ng tao.

"Natural lang, Ate ha."
"Oo naman."
Hindi natural ang gusto nila. Gusto nila iyong tatanggapin.

Sanay na sanay na ako sa mukha ng ibang tao kaya minsan, pag-uwi ko, hindi ko agad makilala ang sarili ko sa salamin. Para akong litratong hindi pa na-e-edit.

Noong Martes, dumating si Mara, anak ko.

Hindi siya mahilig magpapicture. Kahit noong bata, kapag graduation, nakatagilid lagi ang mukha. Sabi niya, hindi raw pantay ang mata niya. Sabi ko, lahat naman tayo hindi pantay. Sabi niya, kaya nga ayaw niya.

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"Ma, kailangan ko ng picture."
"Saan?"
"Agency."
"Anong agency?"
"Care work sa Taiwan. Training muna. May interview."

Hindi ako agad nagsalita. Inayos ko ang kurtina sa likod kahit maayos na. Kulay asul iyon, pero sa lumang ilaw namin, mukha nang tubig-kanal kapag hapon.

"Hindi ka nagsabi."
"Sinasabi ko ngayon."
"May pera ba diyan?"
"Kung matanggap."
"Kung hindi?"
Umupo siya sa bangkito.
"Kunan mo na lang ako, Ma."

Inikot ko ang ilaw. Tinanggal ko ang buhok na nakadikit sa pisngi niya. Hindi siya umurong. Noong bata siya, ayaw niyang hinahawakan ko ang mukha niya. Ngayon, hinayaan niya. Parang hindi na kanya.

"Tingin sa lente," sabi ko.
Tumingin siya.

Nakita ko sa screen ang anak ko. Manipis ang mukha. May maliit na linya sa pagitan ng kilay. May peklat sa baba mula noong nadulas siya sa kanal sa harap ng bahay namin. May konting anino sa ilalim ng mata. May pagkaasim ang bibig, ugaling nakuha niya sa akin.

Kinuha ko ang larawan.
Lumabas siya sa monitor, mas malinaw kaysa sa harap ko.
"Ma, bilisan mo. May pila."

Wala namang pila. Isang matandang lalaki lang sa labas, nagpapalamig sa electric fan na hindi umiikot.

Binuksan ko ang editing program.
Una, liwanag.
Sunod, contrast.
Sunod, balat.

Hindi ko sinasadya sa simula. Ganoon lang talaga ang kamay ko. Sanay. Dumulas ang cursor sa pisngi niya. Nabawasan ang anino. Kuminis ang noo. Lumiit ang peklat sa baba hanggang mawala. Inayos ko ang buhok. Pinantay ang kulay ng labi. Nilagyan ng coat. Itim. May kuwelyo. Parang may inaasahang magandang asal sa leeg niya.

Tumingin siya sa screen.
"Sino 'yan?"
"Arte mo. Ikaw 'yan."
"Hindi ako ganyan kaputi."
"Ilaw lang."

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"Wala akong coat."
"Requirement."
"Wala na 'yong peklat ko."
"Mas malinis tingnan."

Hindi siya sumagot. Matagal niyang pinagmasdan ang larawan. Akala ko magagalit. Sa halip, kinuha niya ang wallet at naglabas ng isandaang piso.

"Anak ka ba ng iba?" sabi ko. "Ba't ka magbabayad?"
"Para customer ako."
Iniwan niya ang pera sa tabi ng keyboard.
Kinabukasan, bumalik siya.

Hindi pumasok. Hindi umupo. Tumayo lang sa harap ng puwesto, hawak ang brown envelope. Basa ang buhok niya sa pawis.

"Hindi tinanggap."
"Bakit?"
"Mismatch."
"Ano?"
"Sa online form, 'yong picture ang ginamit. Doon sa interview, pinaharap ako sa camera. Sabi ng system, face does not match."

Natawa ako nang kaunti, dahil iyon ang unang lumabas sa bibig ko. Hindi dahil nakakatawa. Dahil kung hindi ako tatawa, baka may mabasag sa loob ng dibdib ko.

"System lang 'yon. Puwede ulit."
"Hindi raw. Flagged na."
"Pupunta tayo doon."
"Saan, Ma? Sa camera?"
May pumasok na dalawang estudyante.
"Ate, pa-ID po. Paki-fresh naman."
Hindi ko sila tiningnan.
Kinuha ni Mara ang kopya ng larawan mula sa envelope. Inilapag sa mesa.
"Ayusin mo."
"Aayusin ko."
"Hindi. Ibalik mo."
Binuksan ko ang file. Nasa folder pa rin. MARA_FINAL.jpg.
Naghanap ako ng original. Wala.

Sanay akong mag-save over. Tipid sa space. Tipid sa memory. Tipid sa lahat ng bagay na akala ko puwedeng palitan.

"Wala na," sabi ko.
"Ano'ng wala?"
"Original."
Tumitig siya sa akin.
Sa labas, umandar ang sirang electric fan ng kapitbahay. Umungol ito nang malakas, tapos tumigil ulit.
"Kunanan mo ako ulit," sabi niya.

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Umupo siya sa bangkito. Inayos niya ang buhok. Pinahid ang pawis sa itaas ng labi. Tumingin sa lente na parang humaharap sa taong minsan na siyang hindi pinaniwalaan.

Itinaas ko ang camera.

Sa screen, lumabas ang mukha niya. Bago ko pa mapindot, kusang kuminis ang balat. Nawala ang anino. Lumambot ang panga. Lumiwanag ang mata. May beauty filter pala ang bagong update.

Hinahanap ko kung saan pinapatay.
Settings.
Portrait.
Enhance.
Smooth.
Auto.
Pinindot ko ang off. Bumalik sa on.
Pinindot ko ulit. Bumalik ulit.
"Ma?"
"Sandali."
Naramdaman kong nakatingin siya sa akin, hindi sa lente.

Sa labas, nagsimula nang dumami ang tao. May naghahanap ng xerox. May nagpapalaminate. May batang umiiyak dahil ayaw magpa-picture. May babae sa likod ko na nagsabing, "Ate, mabilis lang po ba? Rush kasi."

Tumingin ako sa anak ko sa screen. Maganda siya roon. Maayos. Maliwanag. Walang bahid. Walang dahilan para tanggihan.
Pero hindi siya ang nasa harap ko.
Ibinaba ko ang camera.
"Ano na?" tanong ni Mara.
Hindi ako sumagot.

Pinatay ko ang ilaw. Hinawi ang asul na kurtina. Pumasok ang araw mula sa palengke, marumi at mainit, pero totoo.
"Sige," sabi ko. "Diyan ka."

Kinuha ko ang lumang cellphone ko. Basag ang salamin. Malabo ang lente. Walang filter. Walang awa.

Tumingin si Mara.
Kinuha ko ang larawan.
Sa screen, bumalik ang anak ko.

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Khimberly Jean P. Cabalbag, Med
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Infanta Campus
Pangasinan, Philippines
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Kinabukasan

Isang panganay na puno ng pangarap. Pangarap na inaasan hindi sigurado kung makakamtan. Buong pusong sinisid ang kapalaran upang ikaw ay makamtan. Madaming sakripisyo, problemang nagdaan ngunit hindi nagpatinag. Patuloy ang pagkamit ng pangarap kahit ito'y napakahirap. Dahil may mga magulang, kapatid na nakaantabay.

Bilangi sang panganay hindi maaaring ipakita o iparamdam na nahihirapan. Ang tanging nasa isipan lang ay ang magpatuloy at harapin ang kinabukasan. Walang sawang pakikipagsapalaran sa araw-araw para makamtan ang inaasam-asam. Laging nasa isipan kung nadapa man ng ilang beses laging babangon at harapin ang kapalaran. Hindi pweding sumuko dahil tayo ang lakas ng buong pamilya. Sa atin nakasalalay ang ating mga magulang at para tularan ng mga sumusunod na mga kapatid.

Hanggang sa unti-unting natutupad ang mga pangarap na inaasam-asam. Palagi lang isipin na kahit gaano na kalayo ang narrating laging mapagkumbaba at huwag lang lumaki ang ulo.

Kahit gaano kahirap, kasaya ang buhay palaging isipin na huwag sumuko sa anumang pagsubok na darating. Mapapagod, manghihina pero huwag susuko para sa kinabukasan.

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Khimberly Jean P. Cabalbag, MEd
Instructor 1
Pangasinan State University - Infanta Campus
Pangasinan, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21206656

Wikang Buhay

Wika mo, wika ko, wika nating lahat
Tinataglay ang wikang pagkakakilanlan
Kahit saan tutungo taglay parin ang pagka Pilipino
Wikang atin, ating tangkilikin

Wikang banyaga maaaring gamitin
Ngunit wikang atin ay huwag kakalimutan
Dahil dito tayo nakikilala
At dito tayo nirerespeto ng mga karatig bansa

Ipagmalaki ang Wikang Filipino
Huwag ikaila na ikaw ay Pilipino
Gamitin at tangkilikin
Upang ang wika nati'y huwag makalimutan

Huwag nating hayaan na mawala ang ating Wika
Bagkus ating ipagmalaki at gamitin
Sapagkat dito natin naipapakita ang tunay na Pilipino
Ating ipagbunyi at pakamahalin ang ating Wikang buhay.

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Paul Nigel S. Abalos, DIT
Assistant Professor III
Pangasinan State University
San Carlos City, Pangasinan
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21206989

Bridging the Digital Divide: Web Development Challenges in ASEAN from an Information Technology Education Perspective

The rapid growth of digital technologies has transformed the way people communicate, conduct business, access education, and deliver public services. Among these technologies, web development remains one of the most essential skills in the information technology profession. Websites and web-based applications serve as the foundation of online services, making web development a key area of expertise for future IT professionals. Across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), governments and educational institutions have recognized the importance of preparing graduates with web development competencies that meet industry expectations. However, despite continuous progress in digital transformation, many challenges continue to influence how web development is taught, learned, and practiced throughout the region. As an Information Technology educator, I see these challenges not only as technical concerns but also as opportunities to strengthen education and prepare students for an increasingly connected world.

One of the most common challenges is the unequal level of digital infrastructure among ASEAN member countries. While countries such as Singapore have advanced digital ecosystems supported by high-speed internet and modern technology facilities, many schools and communities in developing areas continue to experience unreliable internet connectivity, outdated computer laboratories, and limited access to development tools. Students who lack reliable internet access often struggle to participate in online coding activities, cloud-based development environments, and collaborative software projects. This inequality creates differences in learning experiences and limits opportunities for students to develop practical web development skills comparable to those of their regional counterparts.

Another challenge involves the rapidly changing nature of web technologies. Web development evolves at an extraordinary pace. Programming languages, frameworks, libraries, and development tools continue to change as new technologies emerge. Concepts that were considered modern only a few years ago may already be replaced by more efficient approaches. This constant evolution makes curriculum development particularly difficult for higher education institutions. Universities often face delays in revising course content due to lengthy academic approval processes, resulting in graduates learning technologies that may no longer reflect current industry practices. IT educators therefore face the ongoing responsibility of updating instructional materials while balancing institutional requirements and available resources.

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The growing demand for cybersecurity also presents significant challenges in web development education. Modern websites manage sensitive personal information, financial transactions, and organizational data, making security an essential component of every web application. Unfortunately, many beginner developers focus primarily on creating visually attractive websites while giving less attention to secure programming practices. Weak authentication, poor password management, unsecured databases, and vulnerability to common attacks remain common issues among novice developers. Educators must therefore integrate cybersecurity principles into web development courses rather than treating security as a separate subject. Students need to understand that secure coding is an essential professional responsibility rather than an optional skill.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has also begun reshaping the landscape of web development across ASEAN. AI-powered programming assistants can generate code, recommend solutions, identify programming errors, and automate repetitive tasks. These tools have become valuable learning companions, especially for beginners. However, they also introduce new educational concerns. Some students rely too heavily on AI-generated code without understanding the underlying logic or programming concepts. This dependence may reduce problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills that are essential for professional software developers. From an educator's perspective, AI should complement learning rather than replace genuine understanding. Students should be encouraged to analyze, modify, and validate AI-generated solutions instead of simply copying them into their projects.

Industry expectations represent another significant challenge. Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess more than technical programming knowledge. Modern web developers are expected to understand user experience design, responsive interfaces, accessibility standards, cloud deployment, version control systems, database management, teamwork, and communication skills. Unfortunately, many academic projects remain limited to classroom exercises that do not fully simulate real software development environments. Bridging this gap requires stronger collaboration between universities and industry through internships, capstone projects, and industry-based learning experiences that expose students to practical development processes.

Language and cultural diversity across ASEAN also influence web development practices. The region consists of numerous languages, cultures, and user preferences, making website localization an important consideration. Developers must design applications that are accessible to diverse users while respecting local customs and communication styles. Creating multilingual websites and culturally responsive interfaces requires both technical expertise and cultural awareness. Educators can help students appreciate these realities by incorporating user-centered design principles and regional case studies into web development courses.

Another important issue involves faculty development. Because technology changes rapidly, educators themselves require continuous professional learning to remain current with industry standards. Participating in technical training, professional certifications,

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research activities, and collaborative industry projects allows instructors to improve both their technical expertise and teaching strategies. However, limited institutional funding, heavy teaching workloads, and administrative responsibilities often reduce opportunities for continuous professional development. Supporting educators through regular training initiatives ultimately benefits students by ensuring that classroom instruction reflects current technological practices.

Looking ahead, the future of web development education in ASEAN depends on stronger collaboration among governments, educational institutions, technology companies, and industry partners. Investments in digital infrastructure, curriculum modernization, faculty development, and equitable access to technology will help prepare graduates for the demands of the digital economy. Equally important is nurturing lifelong learning habits among students. Since web technologies will continue to evolve throughout their careers, graduates must develop the ability to learn independently, adapt to new tools, and embrace continuous improvement.

As an Information Technology educator, I believe web development education extends beyond teaching programming syntax or website design. It involves preparing students to solve real-world problems, collaborate with diverse teams, and build secure, accessible, and meaningful digital solutions that contribute to society. Although ASEAN continues to face challenges related to infrastructure, technology, curriculum, and workforce readiness, these obstacles also present valuable opportunities for innovation and educational reform. By strengthening web development education today, we equip future professionals with the knowledge, adaptability, and ethical responsibility needed to lead the region's continuing digital transformation.

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Paul Nigel S. Abalos, DIT
Assistant Professor III
Pangasinan State University
San Carlos City, Pangasinan
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Beyond Connectivity: The Growing Role of Artificial Intelligence in Modern Computer Networking

Computer networking has always been one of the foundations of Information Technology. Every email that is sent, every online class that is conducted, every cloud application that is accessed, and every digital transaction that takes place depends on a reliable network. For many years, managing computer networks required professionals to configure devices manually, troubleshoot problems, monitor traffic, and respond to security incidents. Today, however, the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way networks are designed, managed, and maintained. As an Information Technology educator, I believe that understanding AI in networking is no longer an optional skill. It is becoming an essential competency for future IT professionals who will work in increasingly intelligent and automated digital environments.

Traditional network management often relies on human expertise to detect faults and optimize performance. Network administrators spend considerable time reviewing logs, identifying unusual traffic, configuring routers and switches, and responding to system failures. While these responsibilities remain important, the increasing complexity of modern networks has made manual management more difficult. Organizations now operate across multiple locations, cloud platforms, mobile devices, and Internet of Things (IoT) technologies. Managing these environments efficiently requires tools that can process large amounts of data faster than humans can. This is where AI offers significant value by assisting professionals in making faster and more informed decisions.

One of the most practical applications of AI in networking is intelligent network monitoring. AI systems can continuously analyze network traffic, identify patterns, and recognize unusual behavior that may indicate performance issues or security threats. Instead of waiting for users to report slow connections or service interruptions, AI-powered monitoring tools can detect early warning signs and notify administrators before problems become widespread. This proactive approach minimizes downtime and improves the overall reliability of network services. For businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies, maintaining uninterrupted connectivity has become critical for daily operations.

Cybersecurity has also benefited greatly from AI-driven networking solutions. Modern cyberattacks continue to increase in both frequency and sophistication, making traditional rule-based security systems less effective against new threats. AI algorithms can

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analyze massive amounts of network traffic in real time to detect suspicious activities that may not match previously known attack patterns. By identifying unusual login attempts, abnormal data transfers, or unexpected communication between devices, AI helps security professionals respond more quickly to potential breaches. Although human expertise remains essential in cybersecurity, AI provides valuable support by reducing response time and improving threat detection capabilities.

Another important contribution of AI is network automation. Routine administrative tasks such as bandwidth allocation, traffic routing, software updates, and device configuration can now be performed with minimal human intervention. AI-powered systems learn from historical network behavior and recommend optimal configurations that improve efficiency. This allows network engineers to focus more on planning, innovation, and strategic decision-making rather than repetitive maintenance activities. Automation does not eliminate the role of networking professionals; instead, it enables them to spend more time solving complex problems that require creativity, experience, and sound judgment.

The rise of the Internet of Things has introduced additional challenges that AI is helping address. Smart homes, industrial automation systems, healthcare devices, and smart cities all rely on thousands of connected devices communicating simultaneously. Monitoring such large and dynamic networks manually is nearly impossible. AI can classify devices, detect abnormal behavior, optimize communication paths, and ensure that critical services receive appropriate network resources. As IoT adoption continues to expand across different industries, AI-supported network management will become even more valuable.

Despite these advantages, the integration of AI into networking also presents several challenges. One concern is the growing skills gap among IT professionals. Traditional networking education focused heavily on hardware configuration, routing protocols, and network design. While these remain important, future professionals must also understand data analytics, machine learning concepts, automation tools, and cloud technologies. Educational institutions therefore need to update networking curricula to reflect these changing industry demands. Students should graduate with both strong networking fundamentals and an understanding of how AI technologies support modern network operations.

Another concern involves ethical and responsible AI use. AI systems make recommendations based on the data they receive, but they are not free from limitations. Incorrect or incomplete data may result in inaccurate predictions or inappropriate automated decisions. Network administrators should therefore avoid relying entirely on AI-generated recommendations without proper evaluation. Human oversight remains necessary to verify AI outputs, ensure compliance with organizational policies, and maintain accountability. AI should be viewed as an intelligent assistant rather than a replacement for professional expertise.

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For IT educators, these technological changes present an opportunity to transform the learning experience. Students can benefit from laboratory activities that combine traditional networking concepts with AI-enabled monitoring tools, network simulation software, and cybersecurity platforms. Problem-based learning, industry certifications, and collaborative projects can help students understand how AI supports real-world network management. More importantly, educators should encourage critical thinking so that students understand not only how AI works but also when human judgment is necessary.

Looking ahead, AI will continue to influence nearly every aspect of computer networking. Emerging technologies such as 5G, software-defined networking, edge computing, and autonomous networks will depend increasingly on intelligent systems capable of making rapid decisions based on real-time information. Future networking professionals will need to adapt continuously as new technologies reshape industry practices. Lifelong learning, technical curiosity, and adaptability will become just as important as technical knowledge itself.

As an Information Technology educator, I view AI not as a replacement for networking professionals but as a powerful tool that enhances their capabilities. Successful IT professionals of the future will combine technical expertise, analytical thinking, ethical responsibility, and the ability to collaborate with intelligent technologies. By preparing students to understand both networking fundamentals and AI-driven innovations, educational institutions can help develop graduates who are ready to build, secure, and manage the intelligent digital infrastructures that modern society increasingly depends upon.

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Jovani P. Dulnuan, LPT
Alimit Integrated School
Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines
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Mula Usok Hanggang Musika

(Katipunan ng mga Tula)

Tula 1 - Usok Sa Karimlan

Sa oras kung saan ang isipan ay abala sa sari-saring mga bagay ay siya ring pagkakataon ng pusong labis na nalalagay sa ligalig na katayuan. Maging ang mga matang dati'y nababanaag pa ang kasiyahan ay hindi na magawang maikubli ang tunay na damdamin ng kalooban ng isang katauhang surtidos (sari-sari) ang emosyong dala. Nariyan din ang mga oras na ika'y tahimik at tulalang natingin sa kawalan. Sa dinamidami ng mga kaganapang maaaring isagawa at mga bagay na kailangang iganyak maging ang mga pagkakataong dapat paghandaan ay hindi na magawagawa dulot ng bumubulahaw na isipan.

Sa minsang nakahilata at nakapinid ang mga mata ay napapaisip kung bakit nabago ang mga bagay-bagay maging ang sarili'y unti-unting nag-iiba. Nakapikit man ang mga paningin subalit tila nasisilayan ng mga balintataw ang mga hinahangad mong layunin. Subalit sa oras ng pagdilat ay ang pagbungad naman ng katotohanang napakabigat ng iyong pagbangon at pag-ahon mula sa isang malalim na balong nilagpakan kung saan naroon ang karimlang nagtatakip sa iyong mga mata gayunding nagiging pabigat na humihila sa iyong pag-akyat at pagtakas.

Sa pamamalagi ng ilalim ng balon ay ang paglanghap sa isang malakas at umaalingasaw na usok na hindi batid kung saan nagmula na siyang humahadlang sa iyong paghinga dahilan upang ikay maninis (maghabol ng hiniga). Sa kagustuhang takasan ang hasap (usok) mula sa kinalalagyang paligid ay hindi magawa sapagkat tila may nakahawak sa iyong mga paa tulad din sa mga kamay na nakagapos at ang mga braso'y naubusan ng lakas. Nais mang humawak sa tabike (wall) ng balon ay hindi rin magawa sapagkat ang mga palad ay nakatiklop at hindi maibuka. Sa iyong paghihirap sa loob ng balon ay nariyan pa ang karagdagang suliraning nagpapanginig sa buo mong katawan, ang malamig na tubig. Tunay ngang nakamamatay sa loob ng balon sapagkat nanginginig kang nalulunod habang hindi makagalaw dahil sa higpit ng nakahawak sa iyong mga paa at mga lubid na saiyo'y nakapulupot.

Sa labis na takot at pag-aalala ay siya mong pagtili na pilit tinatakpan ng malaking palad upang ika'y hindi marinig ng sinuman. Subalit sa iyong paulit-ulit na pagkilos ay natatabingi minsan ang nakasuklob na palad dahilan upang makawala ang napakalakas na sigaw na may kasamang iyak. Sa labas ng balon ay nariyan ang mga taong naririnig ka ngunit tila nakatiklop

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ang mga tainga na animoy walang naririnig at ni hindi man lamang nila magawang dumungaw upang masdan ang dilim na iyong sinasapit. Ang taong dumadaan sa balon ay bulag, bingi, pipi at higit sa lahat walang tibok ng puso.

Sa pag-asa mong makakita ng liwanag, may maghulog nawa ng lubid. Hirap man ang iyong naginginig na mga palad ay tiyak na magkakaroon ito ng lakas na maibuka dahil sa pag-asang lubid na panghahawakan mo at ika'y hilain upang sa huli ay makaahon. Tiyak na mabuting tao lamang ang makagagawa nito subalit may mga panahong tila walang tao sa iyong paligid habang ika'y nagdurusa.

Kanino ka lalapit? Kanino ka hihingi ng habag?

Tula 2 - Sinag

Sa umagang haharapin ay hanagad na tunay ang iyong sinag na nagbibigay lakas sa katawang nananamlay na siyang dulot ng nakaraan at nambabagyong kahapon. Sa nagpapakatatag na isipang puno ng salita at pangungusap na di mawari ang mga kahulugan ay patuloy ang pagpigil sa salansang na buhat ng mga ito at maging ang mga bato mula sa lupa. Liwanag, hiling ang iyong kapangyarihan upang ilawan at buksan ang bawat isipang natatalukbungan ng makapal na usok at abong ulap. Karagatang matikas na nilikha ng Haring puso ay wagas, iyo nawang utusan ang iyong mga alon nang sa ganon ay tangayin ang bawat kadiliman sa aming katauhan.

Tula 3 - Aliw Ng Baliw

Gakak animo'y langitang dama
Kaluguran ng ina'y kasalatang lubha
Aliw-iw ng baliw dalanging pairugan
Pairugang nawa munti niyang pithaya

Humalhal ka pambihirang baliw
Hamak mong sansinukob ay bukod
Gaya mo'y mapagtakang musmos
Hiwisyo'y di alintana

Paghayo ng gunita'y manauling muli
Patingkadin nawa cordura ni Totoy
Makapangyarihang nasa langit
Panalangin ko'y dinggin

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Tula 4 - Liwanag Nawa

Saan? Saan tayo naparoon? Saan tayo patungo?

Sa gabing di maipalaiwanag, ang tulog ay kadalasang hipig na tila kay ikli ng gabi. Sa pagmulat ng ating mga matang mapupungay ay siyang oras ng kaylamig na liwayway na siyang gumising sa katawa't isipan mula sa maikling pagkahimlay. Kung minsa'y nakapagpapabagabag sa isip at damdamin ang mga pangyayari sa mga minutong tayo'y pupungas-pungas sa pamimitak ng araw, ay gayundin ang pagbalikwas mula sa isang panaginip dulot ng pagod at matinding pag-iisip sa gabing luhaan. Sa dapit umagang kaybilis na sumalubong ay kayhirap manumbalik sa pagtulog na kahit sana'y pagkaidlip lang ng saglit subalit hindi magawang mautusan ang sarili na gawin ito na tila'y may kailangang paghandaan at harapin sa panibagong araw kung kaya't kay aga naman sa pagkagising.

Handa kaya tayong salubungin ang mga pangyayari't pagsubok na nakalaan sa araw na ating kahaharapin?

Ang katanungang ano at saan maging ang bakit at paano ang bumubungad sa atin sa bawat pagmulat na siyang tumutukoy sa ating magiging tunguhin at galaw sa mahabang araw na dulot ng malaking dahilan na siyang nagtutulak sa ating paglalakbay. Ang salitang bakit ang siyang dahilan sa ating paggalaw, tayo'y gumagalaw upang maisaayos ang sari-saring kaisipang nagbabangayan maging ang mga damdaming kailangan ng lunas at pansin sa abot ng ating kakayahang limitado. Bawat isa sa atin ay may kanikaniyang dahilan sa bawat paglakbay at pagkilos. Karamihan sa atin ay pinipiling magpakatatag at magpatuloy sa katinuan. Kayhirap man ng mga pangyayari subalit bumabangon tayo para sa mga taong nakapaligid sa atin na handang kumatig at magmalasakit sa oras ng ating kawalan at kapighatian.

Sa kalagitnaan ng araw ay maaari nating madama ang pag-aalala, kalungkutan at pagkabigo na maaaring humatong sa matinding kapaguran ng ating isipan. Pagkatapos ng mga pangyayaring ito ay muling sasalubong maya't maya ang gabi na siyang oras ng pagmumunimuni sa katatapos na araw. Sa gabing pagmumunimuni, ang tanging hiling lamang sana ay magkaroon ng liwanag ang kinatatayuang paligid nang sa gano'y hindi matisod tulad ng isipang magkaroon nawa ng kapayapaan upang ito'y hindi gumuho at takasan ng katinuan.

Ikaw, Kumusta ka kaibigan?

Huwag ka sanang magpakalumbay dahil sa mga salitang namumutawi sa iyong likuran mula sa mga mapanghusgang hindi perpekto at may kapintasan din, bagkus ay iyong pag-igihan ang iyong gawain at pag-aaral para sa inyong sarili at sa mga taong sa inyo'y nagmamalasakit

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at nagmamahal. Laging tandang may bukas pa at iyo sanang asamin ang ganda ng umagang darating at nawa'y ito na ang inyong paglaya at tagumpay.

Tula 5 - Ako Ang Musika

Puso, tila dama ko ang pintig ng iyong pagkalumbay
Iyong damdaming sawi'y hangad ang dalisay na kaagapay
Iyong maamong wangis tuwing pagmulat ay di ko na matanaw
Silay ng aking balintataw ngayon ang iyong ligalig bawat araw
Ikaw ba'y namimitig sa dagok ng kahapon?

Alon ng nakaraan, huwag ka nawang hatakin sa kailaliman
Bawat lamig at galit ng karagatan ay kayang lunurin ang sinoman
Sa kanyang katubiga'y nagbabadya ng mabalasik na kapahamakan
At ang masilakbong pagdaramdam ay naghahantong sa kahimutukan
Iyong mata ba'y tigib-luha sa sahig ng karagatan?

Luha, huwag nawang humalintulad ang dami sa tubig ng dagat
Tahan na, pagod na talon, dama ko ang lalim ng iyong sugat
Sa bawat bakas ng hapis sa iyong mukha'y banaag ang lamig ng kamatayan
Dalanging mabuhay ang bagong apoy sa iyong nanlamig na katauhan
Dumingas kang muli, nasaan ang iyong buhay na tinig?

Sumama ka sa akin, ako ang tinig ng bawat karanasan at hangarin
Ako'y bungang nagmula sa bawat puso, ako ang subok na damdamin
Batid ko ang kapighatian at pagkabigo; maging pag-ibig at saya
Ako ang payak na takbuhang humahagod sa hapong nadarama
Tinig ko ba'y iyong naririnig?

Ako ang sugo ng bawat tumitibok na puso, ako ay totoo
Ako'y instrumento, lunas ang hangad kong tangi sa iyo
Oo, ako ang iyong kaibigan maging sa panahong ikaw ay balisa
Malugod kong ihahatid ang ligaya at ginhawa sa tuwing ika'y nag-iisa
Inaalala lamang kita, ako'y musika

Ako ang Musika!

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Jimboy B. Pagalilauan, EdD
Associate Professor 1
Cavite State University
Indang, Cavite, Region 4-A, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21213775

Not Yet

You stand before me with gentle eyes,
Holding feelings you do not disguise.
Your words are kind, your heart is true,
And part of me is grateful for you.
But here I am, caught in between,
Unsure of what these moments mean.

The road ahead is blurred from sight,
And my heart is not ready to choose tonight.
It's not that you're lacking, not that you're wrong,
Nor that I've waited for someone else all along.

It's simply that my soul still roams,
Searching for peace before it calls a place home.
I hear your affection, soft and clear,
Yet my own feelings disappear.

Like a song whose melody I cannot find,
Or a chapter unread within my mind.
I wish I could offer certainty,
A promise, an answer, clarity.

But love, I've learned, cannot be rushed,
Nor can a hesitant heart be hushed.
So if I seem distant, please understand,
I'm trying to find where I truly stand.

Not running away, not closing the door,
Just learning myself a little more.
And maybe one day, the timing will be right,
When confusion gives way to light.

But for now, all I can honestly say is this:
Thank you for caring.
I'm just not ready yet.

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Ana Rhea M. Balicog, EdD
Instructor
Bohol Island State University
Bohol, Region 7, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21230537

Sa Gitna ng Bagyo

May mga bagyong hindi nakikita
Hindi dala ng ulan o hanging mabagsik pa
Kundi unos na sa puso'y nananahan
At tahimik na sumisira sa katahimikan.

May mga gabing tila walang umaga
At mga luhang hindi napapansin ng iba.
Mga pangarap na tila naliligaw
At mga hakbang na unti-unting napapaurong.

Ngunit tulad ng punong yumuyuko sa hangin,
Hindi nangangahulugang ito'y bibigay rin.
May lakas na nabubuo sa bawat sugat
At tapang na nahuhubog sa bawat paghihirap.

Ang dilim ay hindi panghabang-buhay,
May bukas na naghihintay sa bawat tagumpay.
At ang araw na muling sisikat
Ay mas maningning matapos ang dinanas.

Kaya kung ang buhay ay tila mabigat
At ang pag-asa ay wari'y kumukupas,
Alalahaning ang bawat unos na dumarating
Ay may aral at lakas na iniiwan din.

Sapagkat ang tao'y hindi nasusukat
Sa dami ng beses na siya'y nasaktan
Kundi sa kakayahang muling bumangon
At harapin ang buhay nang may determinasyon.

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Ana Rhea M. Balicog, EdD
Instructor
Bohol Island State University
Bohol, Region 7, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21231053

Mga Bakas ng Tisa

Sa bawat guhit ng puting tisa
May kuwentong tahimik na binabasa.
Sa pisarang hitik sa pangarap
Buhay ng guro'y unti-unting sumisikat.

Sa bawat tanong na walang kasagutan
Tiyaga ang nagsisilbing sandigan.
Sa bawat pagkakamali't pagdududa
Pag-asa ang muling nagbibigay-sigla.

May mga araw na pagod ang kasama
At pagsubok ang tila nagbabanta.
Ngunit sa puso ng gurong matatag
Pagmamahal sa pagtuturo'y hindi kumukupas.

Bawat mag-aaral na kanyang nahubog
Parang halamang marahang sumibol.
Sa gabay ng kaalaman at kabutihan
Natatagpuan nila ang kanilang daan.

Ang silid-aralan ay hindi lamang lugar
Kundi pugad ng pangarap na marangal.
Dito nahuhubog ang bukas ng bayan
Sa mga kamay ng gurong makabayan.

At kapag ang panahon ay lumipas,
Ang bakas ng tisa ay maaaring maglaho't magwakas.
Ngunit ang aral na naitanim sa isipan
Mananatiling ilaw sa bawat hakbang.

Kaya ating parangalan ang kanilang paglalakbay
Mga gurong nagsilbing tanglaw ng buhay.
Sa pagkatuto, pakikibaka, at pagbabago
Sila ang tunay na bayani ng ating mundo.

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Mary Joy V. Cacho, MEd-TLE
Instructor I / GAD Coordinator
Pangasinan State University- Infanta Campus
Province of Pangasinan, Region I, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21131976

Teaching EPP with Entrepreneurship: Inspiring Young Minds Create Opportunities

Education becomes more meaningful when learners discover that knowledge can transform their lives. In Edukasyong Pantahanan at Pangkabuhayan (EPP) with entrepreneurship, students learn more than practical skills-they develop the confidence to become creative thinkers, responsible decision-makers, and future entrepreneurs.

Teaching EPP with an entrepreneurial focus goes beyond introducing business concepts. It encourages learners to recognize opportunities in their surroundings, maximize available resources, and create products or services that respond to community needs. Every classroom activity, from preparing simple business plans to marketing student-made products, nurtures innovation, teamwork, and perseverance.

The classroom becomes a place where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, and every challenge inspires improvement. Through hands-on experiences, learners understand that success is built through hard work, discipline, and determination. These lessons prepare them not only for future careers but also for everyday life.

As educators, we are responsible for inspiring learners to dream beyond limitations. By integrating entrepreneurship into EPP, we empower students to become problem-solvers who value honesty, creativity, and service to others. We encourage them to believe that even small ideas, when supported by dedication and purpose, can grow into meaningful achievements.

Teaching EPP with an entrepreneurial focus is ultimately about building hope. It equips learners with practical competencies while shaping their character and resilience. In a rapidly changing world, these qualities become valuable assets that enable them to adapt, innovate, and contribute positively to society. Every lesson taught today becomes a seed of opportunity that may one day blossom into a successful enterprise and a brighter future for Filipino learners.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21277612

Building Castles on Gold: The Architecture of Financial Independence

There is a quiet moment in life when money stops being just numbers on a screen and becomes something heavier, something that settles in the mind like a stone in the pocket. In that moment, financial independence stops feeling like a distant ambition and begins to resemble an unfinished structure waiting for its blueprint.

I once believed wealth was loud. It announced itself through visible consumption: a phone replaced before its time, shoes bought out of impulse rather than need, meals ordered to satisfy a hunger that had little to do with food itself. But over time, I began to notice another kind of wealth, silent, disciplined, almost invisible. It belonged to those who were not merely spending money, but building with it.

Building castles on gold is not about extravagance. It is about intention. Gold, in its raw form, is soft, malleable, easily shaped, and easily lost when handled without care. In the same way, income without structure slips away in fragments: unnoticed subscriptions, unexamined habits, and decisions made in haste. Yet when guided by discipline, the same resource becomes the foundation of something enduring.

Financial independence, I learned, is not a single decision but an architecture. Every choice is a brick. Every restraint is a hidden beam of support. Budgeting is not a restriction; it is surveying the ground before construction begins. Saving is not deprivation; it is gathering materials for a future that has not yet taken form. Investing, then, becomes the act of raising structures that continue to grow even in one's absence.

There are seasons when construction feels slow, almost invisible. One works, saves, and repeats the cycle, yet nothing appears to rise. In such moments, it is easy to mistake stillness for failure. But architecture rarely reveals itself in haste. The strongest structures are not those that rise quickly, but those that endure pressure when it arrives without warning. Storms do not announce themselves; they test what has already been built.

I remember an experience when an unexpected expense entered my life like wind through an unsealed window. It was not catastrophic, but it was revealing. It exposed what had not been prepared, what had not been strengthened. The realization was simple yet unsettling: wealth without structure is only potential. It is a possibility without permanence.

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From that point, financial independence ceased to feel like a destination and became a discipline. It was no longer about reaching a fixed amount, but about sustaining a system. A system where every unit of resource had direction, every decision carried intention, and every action extended its effect into the future.

Yet there is something deeply human about this process of construction. It is not mechanical or detached. It is shaped by hope. Each act of saving becomes a quiet belief in a calmer future. Each investment reflects Trust that time can be an ally. Each sacrifice becomes a silent agreement with a future self who will one day inhabit the life being built today.

Perhaps this is what makes financial independence feel less like economics and more like storytelling. We are always constructing something meant to outlast urgency. We transform gold into structure, structure into shelter, and shelter into freedom.

In the end, the castle is never only about wealth. It is about the builder, what they learn in the process: patience in restraint, wisdom in planning, and clarity in understanding that true independence is not defined by what is spent, but by what is preserved and allowed to grow.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21278517

Built to Obsolete: A Personal History of the Corporate Machine

I first understood obsolescence not in a classroom, but in a flickering fluorescent office display during a case study on failing firms. The professor spoke of "market disruption" as if it were a weather pattern, inevitable, impersonal, distant. But the slide on the screen showed something more intimate: a once-dominant corporation reduced to a cautionary tale, its logo still intact, its relevance already gone.

That was my introduction to the corporate machine, not as a stable institution, but as something mechanical and strangely emotional. It breathes through spreadsheets, speaks in quarterly reports, and forgets its own history faster than it creates it.

In Business Administration and Management, we are taught to admire structure. Hierarchies are maps of authority. Flowcharts are promises of efficiency. Strategic plans are treated like blueprints for permanence. Yet the more I studied these systems, the more I noticed how often they were redrawn. Departments reorganized. Roles renamed. Processes "streamlined," which always seemed to mean someone, somewhere, had become redundant.

I remember my first simulation exercise. Our task was to "optimize" a fictional company facing declining profits. We cut costs, automated workflows, and outsourced functions that had names but no longer needed faces. At the end of the exercise, our group presented a thriving balance sheet. The professor nodded. Then he asked a question that lingered longer than the grade we received: "What did you just make obsolete?"

No one answered immediately.

That silence, I've come to realize, is where the corporate machine lives.

Later, during an internship that smelled faintly of coffee and printer ink, I saw it again in real time. The office was modern, with glass walls, minimalist desks, and slogans about innovation printed in Helvetica. But behind the language of progress was something more fragile. Teams competed for relevance. Software replaced routines that once required entire departments. Employees learned to describe themselves as "flexible assets," as if identity itself had become a variable cost.

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One afternoon, I watched a manager scroll through a list of performance metrics like a priest reading omens. Someone's output was down. Someone else's efficiency was up. Decisions followed quickly, quietly. No anger. No celebration. Just an adjustment. The machine did not feel; it recalibrated.

I asked a senior analyst how long she had been with the company. She smiled without looking up from her screen. "Long enough to see three restructurings and two names disappear," she said. It wasn't bitterness. It was a description.

That night, I thought about what it means for something to be "built to obsolete." It suggests intention, as if corporations secretly design their own endings. But the truth feels less deliberate and more systemic. Obsolescence is not a failure of the corporate machine; it is part of its architecture. Growth demands replacement. Efficiency demands removal. Innovation demands forgetting.

And yet, I cannot dismiss the machine entirely. It feeds economies, funds education, and creates pathways for people like me to study its logic. It is both creator and eraser, architect and demolition crew.

As I move deeper into the discipline of management, I find myself learning its language while questioning its grammar. We speak of sustainability, but often mean continuity of profit. We speak of innovation, but often mean the acceleration of turnover. We speak of people as resources, forgetting that resources do not carry memory.

Perhaps that is what makes the corporate machine so enduring: it does not resist obsolescence; it normalizes it. It teaches us to accept disappearance as progress.

And so, I return, in thought, to that first classroom slide. A company once powerful, now irrelevant, still perfectly structured in its final image. I realize now it was not just a case study. It was a mirror.

Because in the end, everything inside the corporate machine is built with one quiet understanding: that to survive in motion, something else must always be made obsolete.

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+639543906965



Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21278693

Chasing the Return: A Conceptual Narrative on the True Cost of Capital

I first learned that capital has a price in a classroom where the air-conditioning struggled against the afternoon heat. The professor wrote it on the board in clean, decisive strokes: *Cost of Capital*. It looked harmless there, almost clinical, like a measurement that could be trusted to behave.

Debt. Equity. Risk premium, expected return.

Each term clicked into place like parts of a machine that had already been assembled long before we entered the room.

But what stayed with me was not the formula. It was the pause after it.

Because when the professor asked, "Why does capital require a return?" the room answered with silence dressed as note-taking. I wrote the definition anyway, as if writing it down would make it feel complete. Yet even then, something about it felt incomplete, like describing a storm using only humidity levels.

Years later, I encountered the concept again, not as theory, but as atmosphere.

I was inside a corporate office that smelled faintly of paper, coffee, and time that had been measured too carefully. Everything there had a justification. Meetings existed to validate decisions. Decisions existed to optimize returns. Even silence felt temporary, like it was waiting to be filled with productivity.

On my desk sat a project evaluation sheet. The numbers were clean, almost reassuring. Expected return: acceptable. Risk profile: manageable. Payback period: within range.
It looked like certainty.

But certainty in business, I learned, is often just well-organized uncertainty.
A senior analyst leaned over my shoulder and said, "Looks good on paper. But paper doesn't carry the full cost."

I asked what she meant.

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She tapped the corner of the sheet, not pointing at the numbers but at what wasn't there. "We're not just paying investors," she said. "We're paying time. We're paying attention. We're paying for decisions we won't have room to undo later."

That sentence did not appear in any model I had studied.

In Business Administration and Management, we are trained to think of capital as something that moves toward efficiency, allocated, optimized, and maximized. The goal is always better returns, faster growth, and stronger value creation. But the more I observed, the more I realized that chasing returns is not just a financial strategy. It is a behavioral condition.

Organizations begin to orient themselves around expectation. Every department learns to justify its existence in terms of output. Every initiative is weighed not only by what it costs, but by how quickly it can prove itself worthy of the cost of capital.

And slowly, something shifts.

Projects that are meaningful but slow are postponed. Decisions that are uncertain but potentially transformative are diluted into safer versions. People begin to measure their worth in contributions per unit of time.

The return is no longer just a goal; it becomes a discipline.

I once asked a manager how he defined success. He didn't answer immediately. Instead, he looked at the screen filled with performance dashboards, each one glowing with green indicators. "Success," he said finally, "is staying ahead of what we owe."
He did not mean debt alone. He meant expectation itself.

That was when I began to understand that the true cost of capital is not fully captured in financial statements. It lives in the pressure to continuously justify existence through performance. It appears in the decisions not taken, the risks not accepted, and the possibilities quietly abandoned in favor of predictable returns.

Now, when I hear the phrase *cost of capital*, I no longer imagine formulas. I imagine a constant negotiation between ambition and obligation. A quiet trade-off between what an organization could become and what it must deliver.

Because chasing the return is not only about achieving profit, it is about surviving the demand to make every moment financially defensible.

And somewhere in that chase, the true cost is always being paid, just not always in the place we are trained to look.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21280416

Depreciation Schedules: A Personal Accounting of the Burnout Epidemic

I first encountered depreciation as something neat and controlled, an accounting method that spreads the cost of an asset across time. Straight-line. Declining balance. Useful life. Salvage value. In class, it made sense: machines wear down, buildings age, equipment loses value. You match expense with benefit. You make time calculable.

No one mentioned that people might also have useful lives.

The idea didn't arrive all at once. It came quietly, as most uncomfortable realizations do in Business Administration and Management, hidden inside frameworks meant to explain efficiency. We learn to account for assets, to track performance, to allocate costs logically across periods. Everything has a schedule. Everything, ideally, can be forecast.

Except for recovery.

I remember sitting in a lecture hall while the professor projected a depreciation table on the screen. The numbers stepped downward in clean intervals, each year a predictable reduction in value. I found myself wondering what a human version of that table would look like. Would it begin with enthusiasm? Would it end with resignation? And where, exactly, would we place maintenance?

At the time, I dismissed the thought as overinterpretation. Students of management are trained to think in systems, not feelings. But systems have a way of spilling into the personal.

I saw it first during my internship.

The office was efficient in the way modern organizations often are, quiet, fast, and always slightly behind its own targets. Performance dashboards glowed constantly, updating in real time like a heartbeat that refused to slow down. Everyone had deliverables. Everyone had deadlines. Everyone had a way of explaining why they were tired without ever using the word burnout.

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One employee told me, half-joking, "We're all depreciating assets here. Some just last longer than others."

He said it while smiling at his screen.

At first, I thought it was just workplace humor. But then I noticed the pattern. New hires arrived like freshly acquired equipment, high energy, high output, high expectations. They were "invested in," trained, and optimized. For a while, they performed above capacity. Then gradually, the pace normalized. Overtime became routine. Breaks became strategic. Exhaustion became background noise.

No one called it a decline. They called it experience.

In management theory, we are taught that human capital appreciates with training and exposure. But in practice, appreciation often comes with a hidden counterpart: depletion. The more one learns to function within the system, the more one becomes shaped by its demands.

I began to notice how language softened exhaustion. "Busy" replaced "overworked." "Committed" replaced "overextended." "Resilient" replaced "running on empty." These were not lies. They were accounting adjustments, ways of keeping the books balanced without acknowledging loss.

One evening, I stayed late to finish a report. The office was nearly empty; the lights dimmed to a softer version of themselves. A colleague passed by my desk, paused, and asked, "Still here?"

I nodded.

She gave a small smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "Just make sure you're not writing yourself off too early," she said, and walked away.

That phrase lingered with me: writing yourself off. In accounting, to write off an asset is to acknowledge that its value can no longer be recovered. It is a final entry. Clean. Irreversible.

But burnout does not feel clean. It feels cumulative. It is not one entry but many small ones, missed rest, delayed recovery, normalized fatigue, accumulating until something quietly changes in how a person shows up to their own life.

In Business Administration, we are taught to manage resources efficiently. But what happens when the resource is human attention, emotional capacity, or time itself? What schedule do we use then?

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There is no standard depreciation model for motivation. No universally accepted formula for enthusiasm loss. And yet, in many organizations, people are still being measured as if there were.

Now, when I hear the word depreciation, I no longer think only of machines or buildings. I think of calendars filled beyond capacity. I think of weekends that function as recovery windows rather than rest. I think of people quietly recalculating their own endurance without ever calling it accounting.

Because burnout is not an exception to the system.

It is one of its unrecorded schedules.

And somewhere between the spreadsheets and the silence, value continues to decline, not suddenly, but steadily, until it becomes difficult to remember what full capacity ever felt like.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21280595

The Alchemy of Leverage: Turning Strategic Velocity into Market Fortune

There are moments in business when theory quietly collides with reality, not in lecture halls or case studies, but in the lived experience of decisions that carry weight. I first understood the meaning of leverage not as a definition, but as a consequence. It revealed itself in the difference between firms that merely operate and those that consistently expand beyond the limits of their initial resources.

I recall observing two small enterprises that began under similar conditions. Both had limited capital, modest teams, and comparable market opportunities. On paper, their trajectories should have been alike. Yet over time, their outcomes diverged. One moved cautiously, weighed down by hesitation and fragmented decisions. The other seemed to flow forward with direction, each action reinforcing the next, each decision building momentum. It was not simply speed that separated them, but alignment: the ability to convert motion into structured progress.

This is where strategic velocity becomes meaningful. It is not the reckless acceleration of activity, but the disciplined coordination of timing, direction, and intent. In business management, velocity without strategy is exhaustion disguised as productivity. But when strategy and timing align, movement becomes cumulative. Every decision begins to reinforce the next, and what once appeared as isolated actions becomes a system of growth.

Leverage enters this system as its quiet transformation principle. In financial management, it is seen in the use of capital to amplify returns. In operations, it appears in efficiency that allows output to exceed input proportionally. In leadership, it emerges when guidance multiplies the capacity of teams rather than replacing their initiative. Yet in its deeper sense, leverage is not simply a technical tool; it is the art of extending impact without proportionally increasing effort.

I witnessed this principle clearly during an internship experience in a small trading business. The owner, operating with limited staff, did not attempt to expand by increasing workload alone. Instead, he restructured processes: inventory tracking was simplified, supplier coordination was digitized, and decision-making was delegated strategically. What changed was not effort, but design. Within months, operations became smoother, delays were reduced, and customer satisfaction improved. The business was not working harder; it was working differently. That difference was leverage in action.

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However, leverage carries its own discipline. When misunderstood, it can amplify not only growth but also risk. I saw this in another case where rapid expansion, fueled by borrowed capital and aggressive scaling, outpaced operational stability. At first, growth appeared impressive: new branches, increased sales, visible momentum. But beneath the surface, systems were overstretched. Cash flow became unstable, coordination weakened, and eventually, expansion turned into strain. Velocity without structural balance had transformed into vulnerability.

These experiences reshaped my understanding of market fortune. It is not a sudden event or isolated success. It is the outcome of repeated alignment between strategy and execution, ambition and capacity, risk and control. In business administration, this alignment is not accidental; it is designed through planning, monitoring, and continuous adjustment.

Over time, I began to see organizations as living architectures. Capital is not merely spent but positioned. Strategies are not merely declared but tested against uncertainty. Even failures become structural lessons, revealing where the system lacks reinforcement. In this sense, management becomes an act of construction, each decision forming part of an invisible structure that supports future outcomes.

The "alchemy" of leverage lies in this transformation. It turns limited resources into expanded influence, not through magic, but through disciplined design. Strategic velocity provides the movement, but leverage gives that movement direction and a multiplier effect. Together, they shape outcomes that appear externally as fortune, but internally are the result of structure, discipline, and intention.

In the end, financial success is not defined by how fast an organization moves, but by how effectively it converts movement into lasting advantage. The true architecture of market fortune is built quietly, through decisions that align, systems that support, and strategies that endure. And within that architecture, leverage becomes the unseen force that turns effort into expansion, and expansion into sustained success.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21281141

The Asset of Silence

Silence has a strange way of accumulating value.

In the vocabulary of commerce, we are taught to listen to the noise of transactions, the alert of a sale, the notification of an expense, the constant marketplace chatter pushing us to exhaust our capital. But over time, financial stability begins to behave differently. It stops being about what you display and starts becoming about what you store. It is found in the quiet spaces of a ledger where numbers do not move: funds unspent, consumer desires delayed, and reserves kept in absolute stillness.

I used to think budgeting was a form of restriction, a passive act of missing out while the modern economy moved forward loudly. But in practice, financial restraint is often chosen. It is selected carefully, like a strategy that does not announce itself as a strategy. In a culture where status is measured in outward acquisitions, a cash reserve can look like stagnation or an idle account. But sometimes it is a calculation. Sometimes it is microeconomic self-defense. It is the active preservation of resources that would otherwise spill too quickly into immediate consumption.

There are moments when managing cash flow becomes a quiet form of self-authorship. Choosing when to spend and when to withhold is a structural negotiation with scarcity. Capital, like energy, is not infinite. Every uncalculated transaction creates long-term consequences that linger far beyond the joy of purchase. And so, liquid savings begin to function like an active asset, something held back not because it lacks transactional value, but because its emotional value is too high to risk.

In environments shaped by unpredictable financial shocks, inflation, and sudden emergencies, this liquid cushion takes on a deeper meaning. It is often mistaken for passive hoarding or a lack of investment initiative. Yet it is neither. It is operational solvency on a human scale. While the marketplace fills our screens with the noisy urgency of digital consumerism, a financial margin allows uncertainty to remain manageable.

I noticed this most in moments where economic pressure gathered quietly around unexpected crises, a sudden medical bill, a dip in institutional income, or a broken piece of equipment. Not every emergency rewards panic; most demand an immediate strategic response. Silence, in those moments, is the absolute absence of financial panic. Having an

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emergency fund acts as an invisible psychological boundary. It keeps market volatility from becoming a personal disaster.

Outside of bank statements, this protective silence shapes how a person moves through ordinary routines. It alters the texture of a day, removing the chronic undercurrent of anxiety that tracks every utility deadline and overdue bill. These cash reserves are not empty metrics on a spreadsheet; they hold spaces of safety in suspension. They buy a rare luxury in a volatile system: the ability to pause, recalibrate, and breathe before making an economic move.

There is also the profound peace that arrives after a financial storm has passed without collapsing your household. That safety does not announce its presence with ceremony. It simply remains. In that stable space, you begin to realize that a budget is not a prison; it is a blueprint for independence. It moves your story away from survival and toward strategic choice.

Over time, I started to recognize thrift not as deprivation, but as an investment in quiet. A well-placed reserve prevents systemic vulnerability. It preserves clarity. It holds a space for personal dignity that predatory loans or high-interest debts would otherwise compromise. It is one of the few forms of financial management that does not require permission from a bank to exist.

Perhaps that is why a cash buffer truly feels like an asset. Not because it generates compound interest in a ledger, but because it is always present, quietly carrying the human experience through moments that speech, debt, and panic cannot afford to hold.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21281319

The Language of Debt

Debt does not arrive loudly.

It enters the quiet grammar of reminders, polite, procedural, precise. A message appears on a screen, or a voice slips through a call, carefully trained not to sound like an intrusion. At first, it feels like language meant for someone else, someone more careless, more distant from responsibility. But language has a way of adjusting its target. Eventually, it learns your name.

I began to notice how debt speaks in variations of certainty. It rarely asks questions. It declares. It reminds. It informs. "Your account is overdue." "Please settle your balance." "Final notice." Each phrase is structurally neutral, yet each one carries a tone that tightens over time, as a corridor narrows the further you walk into it. The words are simple, but their repetition builds weight.

What unsettled me most was not the content of these messages, but their emotional restraint. There is no anger in them, no pleading either. Only a steady professionalism makes human difficulty feel like administrative failure. In that space, emotion is translated into status codes. Struggle becomes delay. Delay becomes non-compliance. And slowly, a person becomes something more difficult to recognize in language designed for efficiency.

Outside of these messages, life continues in its ordinary refusal to pause. People line up at stores. Conversations drift toward meals, weather, small plans that assume continuity. Even the sunlight seems indifferent, falling on sidewalks with the same patience it gives to everything else. But inside the rhythm of debt, time behaves differently. It fragments into deadlines, due dates, and overdue intervals that stretch and compress depending on what is owed.

I remember holding my phone and rereading a message more than I needed to, as if repetition could soften its meaning. It never did. Instead, it revealed something else: how easily language can detach from context. A sentence that looks administrative on the surface can feel deeply personal when it starts describing your limitations more accurately than your intentions ever could.

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There is a strange intimacy in being consistently addressed by systems that do not know you. They know your balance but not your reasons. They know your timeline but not your interruptions. And yet, because they speak in certainty, they begin to feel authoritative about identity itself. You start to wonder if you are the delay they describe, if you are the risk they calculate, if you are the pattern they have predicted.

But debt is not only a system of numbers. It is also a system of interpretation. It translates human unpredictability into measurable consequence. In doing so, it simplifies life into something legible, but also something incomplete. No message can carry the full weight of what leads to a missed payment. No notice can include the invisible negotiations that happen between survival and obligation.

Over time, I began to hear debt differently, not just as pressure, but as language trying and failing to compress lived experience into administrative clarity. It speaks in a grammar that values precision over understanding, consistency over context. Yet beneath that rigidity, there is an unintended honesty: it reveals how fragile stability really is, how quickly a life can shift from balance to imbalance without changing its outward appearance.

And so, the language of debt remains double-edged. It diminishes, but it also exposes. It reduces identity to account status, but in doing so, it reveals how easily identity resists reduction.

Because beneath every reminder, every notice, every carefully constructed sentence, there is still a person reading between the lines, trying to translate themselves back into something whole.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.21280753

The Margin of Choice

Choice is rarely as wide as it sounds.

It often appears not as an open road, but as a narrow margin, thin enough that you only notice it when you are already standing inside it. Between what must be paid and what can wait. Between what is wanted and what is possible. Between what is planned and what quietly falls apart without warning.

I used to think choices announced themselves clearly, like doors opening with enough space to walk through without hesitation. But life has a different way of arranging decisions. It places them in corners, between schedules, inside deadlines that do not pause for reconsideration. You do not always choose freely. Sometimes you choose what remains.

There was a time I kept track of everything on paper, numbers, due dates, small calculations that tried to make uncertainty behave. Each entry looked simple on its own, but together they formed a kind of quiet pressure. Not loud enough to panic over, but persistent enough to follow you into the day. A list does not argue. It only waits to be addressed.

And yet, even within those lists, some moments felt like choice. Choosing which obligation to face first. Choosing what to delay. Choosing what to ignore for a little longer, even while knowing that delay is not the same as disappearance. These were not dramatic decisions. They were small negotiations with time.

I began to notice how easily choice becomes invisible when it is reduced to survival. You stop calling it decision-making. You start calling it managing. Managing expenses. Managing time. Managing expectations. The word "manage" sounds stable, controlled. But often it is just another way of describing imbalance that has not yet collapsed.

Still, life outside these quiet calculations continued with its own rhythm. People made plans that assumed continuity, trips scheduled weeks ahead, meals decided in advance, conversations that moved forward without circling back to what was unresolved. From the outside, everything looked like progress. From the inside, it often felt like balancing on something that did not guarantee tomorrow.

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There were days when even simple decisions felt heavy. Not because they were complicated, but because they carried consequences that stretched further than they should. A small choice about today could affect tomorrow in ways that were not immediately visible. That awareness changes how you move through time. It makes hesitation part of thinking.

And yet, within that hesitation, something else exists. A kind of resistance that is quiet but persistent. The refusal to let circumstances completely define direction. Even when options are limited, there is still the act of choosing how to respond to them. Not all control disappears; it simply changes shape.

I started to understand that the margin of choice is not about abundance. It is about space, however small, where intention still exists. It might not look like freedom in the traditional sense. It might look like adjustment, compromise, or endurance. But it is still a form of authorship over one's own movement through uncertainty.

Over time, I learned that choices do not always announce their importance. Some of the most significant ones are quiet. They happen in pauses, in delays, in the way you decide to continue rather than stop, or to stop rather than continue. They do not always feel powerful while they are happening. Their meaning often arrives later, when you look back and realize that something shifted without ceremony.

The margin, then, is not space. It is inhabited. By hesitation, by responsibility, by the quiet effort of trying to remain steady when certainty is not available. It is where life does not offer clear instructions, only possibilities shaped by limitation.

And perhaps that is what makes it human. Not the certainty of choice, but the fact that even within constraints, something is still being chosen.

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Nerinessa B. Santiago, DBA
Faculty
Pangasinan State University
Pangasinan Region 1, Philippines
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Total Quality Fatigue: When Continuous Improvement Breaks the Human Machine

I first learned that "quality" could become a burden in a room where nothing was allowed to stay still. Even the air felt managed, circulated, filtered, optimized. On the whiteboard, the phrase *continuous improvement* was written like a moral instruction rather than a management principle. It wasn't presented as an option. It was presented as a condition for survival.

In Business Administration and Management, we are taught that quality is a competitive advantage. Total Quality Management promises efficiency through discipline: standardize processes, reduce defects, refine output, and repeat. In theory, it is elegant. A system that learns from itself. A machine that corrects its own errors.

But no one tells you what it feels like to be inside a system that never stops correcting. My first encounter with it in practice was during an internship in a mid-sized firm that proudly described itself as "process-driven." Every task had a template. Every output had a checklist. Every checklist had an audit trail. At first, it felt reassuring, like structure as protection, order as clarity. I thought discipline was the same as stability.

Then I noticed the revisions never really ended.

A report would be submitted, reviewed, returned, adjusted, and resubmitted, not because it was wrong, but because it could always be better. A presentation would pass approval, then be reopened "for refinement." Even small decisions carried feedback loops that stretched longer than their usefulness.

One afternoon, I asked a senior analyst how she knew when something was finished. She didn't look up from her screen. "You don't," she said. "You just reach the point where it stops being worth improving."

She said it like it was normal.

That was the first time I understood fatigue in that environment wasn't about workload alone. It was about the uncertainty of completion. Nothing felt final. Everything felt temporary, waiting to be revisited.

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In theory, continuous improvement relies on learning cycles: Plan, Do, Check, Act. In practice, the cycle becomes a loop that quietly erases the feeling of arrival. The organization keeps moving, but the people inside it stop recognizing rest as a legitimate endpoint.

I began to see it in small behaviors. People hesitated before saying "this is done." They softened conclusions with phrases like "for now" or "subject to review." Even achievements were framed as starting points for further optimization. Success became unstable, always one audit away from revision.

There was one evening I stayed late to finalize a report that had already been reviewed three times. The office was nearly empty, except for the glow of monitors and the soft hum of machines that never stopped working even when the people did.

A manager passed by and paused at my desk. He looked at the document, then at me. "Good," he said. Then after a pause, "But don't make good your stopping point."
He walked away before I could respond.

I remember staring at the screen afterward, unsure whether I had completed something or delayed its next revision cycle. That feeling lingered longer than the task itself.

In management education, continuous improvement is framed as progress, an ethical commitment to excellence. But what I began to observe was a different outcome: the gradual normalization of unfinished work and the quiet acceptance that nothing would ever fully stabilize.

Over time, "improvement" stopped feeling like growth. It started feeling like maintenance without end. Like running faster on a treadmill that recalibrates its speed every time you adjust.

Total Quality Fatigue is not dramatic. It does not arrive as a collapse. It arrives as persistence without closure, as an effort without a sense of arrival. As a human system slowly adapts to machine logic, it forgets what rest feels like.

Now, when I hear the phrase *continuous improvement*, I don't immediately think of efficiency anymore. I think of repetition disguised as progress. I think of systems that learn everything except when to stop.

And I think of the people inside them, still refining, still adjusting, still moving, long after the point where improvement should have become rest.

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+639543906965



Gina M. Galbo, EdD
Associate Professor IV
Bohol Island State University-Candijay Campus
Candijay, Bohol, Region VII, Philippines
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Lyka's Words in the Dust

The first time Lyka walked into my tutorial class, she clutched a battered notebook and stared at the floor, as if the grout between the tiles held easier stories than the pages in her hands. Outside, a wind carried the bitter scent of dust from the mine on the hill, the same hill where her father had worked until the landslide took him. The community had grown used to the gray haze that settled over everything, but children still coughed and missed school. Lyka had missed more than most.

She hovered behind the classroom door, small, shoulders slumped, her uniform clean but faded. Dust clung to the hem of her skirt, and to the worn slippers she shuffled in. When I called her name, she lifted her head only halfway, like a child wary of more chores, more expectations, more reminders of things she could not manage.

She was the oldest of eight. The weight of that number showed in the way she spoke of home. Soft, brief, as if long explanations were a luxury she could not afford. Each morning, she fetched water, cooked rice, and watched her younger siblings while her mother sold vegetables by the mining gate. By the time she walked to school along roads powdered with truck dust, she was already tired. Reading, especially reading aloud, felt like another mountain for Lyka.

Our university had set up an extension program to help children in nearby communities who struggled with reading, and I had volunteered to take the worst cases. Lyka's test papers were nearly blank in comprehension; when I asked her to read a short passage during our first session, she stumbled over simple words, skipped entire lines, then fell silent, eyes bright with embarrassment as she gripped her notebook until it bent.
The tutorial room went quiet except for her uneven breathing. I closed the book and set it down. *"Tell me about your family, Lyka," I said.*

She hesitated, then began. She described their tiny home near the mine, how the wind sometimes blew so much dust inside they had to shield their plates while eating, how her younger siblings cried at night for their father. Her mother worked long hours; the baby clung to Lyka's skirts whenever she tried to leave. She told, in a small voice, of the day the hill shook and swallowed her father's world.

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Listening, I realized the problem was not a lack of intelligence but a lack of time, space, and quiet practice. Her days were full of tasks, noise, and worry; nights were crowded with crying children and the rasp of her mother's cough. In a life like that, books felt like a luxury. Her attendance soon revealed another obstacle. Lyka came faithfully at first, dusty and dutiful, but empty chairs began to appear on other days. She would apologize when she arrived late. No one to mind the toddlers, a stall to run by the gate, but the choices she faced each morning were real: come to school and learn, or stay home and keep the family fed.

I decided the classroom had to give her a tangible reason to choose it. So, I started bringing small rewards from my own pocket, like coins, pencils, erasers, little notebooks, and sometimes candies. I told her that each time she read a sentence correctly, she would earn something. Her eyes widened with a surprise that looked like hope; for a girl who habitually put others first, the idea that her reading could bring back coins or notebooks for her siblings struck something quiet inside her.

The next session, Lyka sat a little straighter. Afternoon light slanted through the window, making the dust look like gold. I wrote short sentences on strips of manila paper, sentences about her life: *"Lyka cooks rice." "Lyka helps her mother." "Lyka loves her brothers and sisters."* For each sentence she read aloud without error, I placed a coin or a pencil on the table. At first, she sounded out every syllable as if the letters were fragile things that might shatter if she hurried. With each correct reading, the small pile of prizes grew.

She kept stealing glances at the rewards and then back to the words, as if she were stitching each effort to the future she imagined for her family: more pencils, a new notebook, a little cash for rice. The prizes did not fix everything, but they made the classroom a place that could return something to her household. When family needs tugged at her, she thought of the pencils she could carry home and sometimes chose to come.

Her persistence impressed me. After caring for seven children and walking from the mining village, she still sat down and traced the letters until whole words emerged. When she stumbled, she did not give up; she tried again, pressing her lips together, eyes narrowing as if the letters were stones, she needed to move one at a time.

Sometimes she would smile, counting her coins at the end of a session and planning which sibling would get the new pencil. The coins became more than money; they were evidence that her time had value, that her effort could make a difference.

Weeks later, under an orange sky that mixed with the mine's gray haze, we read a short story about a brave girl determined to finish school despite poverty. For the first time, Lyka read an entire paragraph aloud without skipping a line. Her voice trembled at first, but then steadied, gaining strength like a small stream pushing between rocks. She paused on a difficult word, breathed, then sounded it out slowly. When she reached the period, she looked up at me, expecting maybe another coin, but what shone brightest was pride.

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"You did that," I told her.

I placed a coin on her notebook, but the real reward was different: confidence budded in the space between us. *"Ma'am," she said quietly, then firmer, "I want to read more."* That night, the dust seemed less heavy in my mind. I could see, almost physically, the path opening for her; not cleared of obstacles, but ignited by words she could now read.

By the program's end, Lyka was no longer the child who hid behind her notebook. She raised her hand to read short parts of stories in class. At home, her younger siblings began bringing borrowed books from neighbors and the small school library, eager to hear their big sister read aloud. She still stumbled over long words, still mixed similar letters when tired, still missed sessions when family needs demanded it. However, her progress was steady: sentence by sentence, coin by coin, book by book.

Visiting her house made the work feel real. The yard was hard-packed earth, the air thick with smoke and mine dust. Her mother greeted me with a tired smile. Inside, the children crowded around the small wooden table where Lyka kept the pencils and coins she had earned, handling them as if they were treasures. In that narrow home, I understood the true weight of every sentence Lyka had read.

Helping Lyka was a quiet success that changed both of us. She gained the courage to face a page of words; I learned the responsibility of teaching beyond syllabi and lesson plans. Lyka still walks the dusty road, still cares for her siblings, and still carries the absence of her father in every corner of their house. However, now she carries something immovable: the skill to read her way through opportunities, a thing no landslide can take.

Each time she reads, she proves that endurance guided by patience, small rewards, and genuine care can turn even the hardest places into classrooms of hope. Moreover, whenever I remember her, I am reminded that teaching is not only lessons in books, but entering real lives and walking with children, step by step, toward futures they can finally read for themselves.

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+639543906965



Christopher U. Palomares, LPT
School Focal Person/ SHS Instructor
Nuestra Señora De Guia Academy
Valenzuela, Metro Manila
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Tagapagligtas ng Sangkaputian

Ang pagsusuri sa konteksto ng mga patalastas sa pangmadlang media ay isang mabisang paraan para bakasin kolonyalismo at monopolyo ng kapitalismo sa Pilipinas. Lalong napatitingkad ng patalastas ang imahe ng seksismo at feminisasyon sa lipunan. Nilalapatan sila ng mga negatibong pananaw bilang marumi, pangit at hindi buo kung walang lalaki bagay na hindi na bago dahil normal na ito sa lipunang patriyarkal at kanluraning impluwensiya. Madalas mapapanood na babae ang palaging bida kung ang inaalok ay sabon, pampaputi o pampaganda. Dalawa ang makikitang atake sa ganitong uri ng patalastas: pagbuo ng pangangailangan at pagbebenta ng kasagutan. Kaya makikitang bumubuo ng isang ideyal na istandard ang patalastas para ipasok sa isipan ng konsumer na ito ang tama at karapat-dapat sundin o bilhin.

Babalik sa papel ng kababaihan ang pagbuo ng produkto at patalastas. Ang kababaihan ang pangunahing produkto ng negosyante at pangunahin ding taga-konsumo ng sarili nito marahil ito sa nosyon na ang sukatan ng babae ay ang kagandahan. Materialistiko kasi ang kagandahan, nalalapatan ng produkto at nailalapat sa produkto. Bulnerable ang babae lalo kung ang lipunan ay nakasentro sa Patriyarkal. Ang paniniwala sa kababaihan bilang isang produkto ay bunsod ng namamayaning kultura–nagmula sa sentro.

Sa pagpasok ng kapitalista sa pangmadlang media, samot-saring patalastas ang nagsulputan upang ialok ang kababaihan. Naging paraan ito ng monopolyo ng kapitalismo upang magkaroon ng domestikasyon at komodipikasyon sa mga konsumer. Babae ang pangunahing bentahe ng mga patalastas dahil sa imperyalistang Estados Unidos kaya naging madali ang pagpasok ng kanilang produkto sa merkado. Para itong Amerikanisasyon o makabagong kolonyalismo gamit ang teknolohiya at media. Katulad sa mga patalastas ng sabong panlaba, laging itinatampok ng *Tide, Ariel, Surf* at iba pa ang mga babae (madalas ay nanay) bilang labandera. Ang ganitong konsepto ay pumapaksa sa *gender roles* kung saan idinidikta sa babae kung anong gampanin niya na dapat makita ng lipunan.

Sa halimbawang patalastas ng *Surf,* may pagkakataong ipinakita na uuwi ang lalaki nang marumi at ipapalaba sa babae ang damit nito matapos ay ipinapasok ang kanilang produkto bilang pampabango sa labahin ng babae. Gayundin ang ipinakita sa ilang komersyal ng *Tide*, ipinamalas na kahit anong kuskos ng babae sa damit ng kanyang anak na lalaki ay hindi pa rin ito lumilinis hanggang sa ginamitan na ng *Tide*. Maituturing na nakatali pa rin sa primordiyal na kaakuhan ang ganitong ideya sa mga patalastas. Papasok din ang konseptong makapangyarihan ang lalaki dahil sa ilang patalastas ng sabong panlaba ay makikitaan na lalaki ang may trabaho at may kapasidad bumili ng sabong panlaba, kaya naman ang babae ay naiiwan sa bahay para magsilbi. Isama pa na pinagsisilbihan sila ng kababaihan. Kung lalaki ang itinuturing sa patalastas ng sabong panlaba na mataas o nasa

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tuktok ng *social class*, tama lang sabihin na mas maraming hindi makatwirang gawi o pambabalahura ang ginagawa ng ganitong patalastas sa kababaihan. Lalong isasadlak sa karukhaan ang babae para maging matingkad ang puwesto nila sa lipunan. Gayumpaman, nasa anyong bulgar-konserbatibo pa rin ang diskriminasyon at opresyon sa patalastas. Katulad sa *Ariel*, hinehele nila ang mga kababaihan na simbolismo sila ng kalinisan at kasipagan o inilalapat sa konseptong positibo dahil napapasaya nila ang kanilang asawa at anak. Nagiging bulgar naman dahil ipinapakita pa rin nito ang *gender roles* at tagong nosyon na marumi talaga ang babae kaya kailangang paulit-ulit na maglinis.

Ayon sa *United Nations on Human Rights*, dahil sa *gender stereotypes*, nagkakaroon ng prekonsepsyon sa kakayahan ng babae kaya madalas na nalilimitahan ang kanilang kapasidad. Sa palabas ng *Breeze,* ipinakita ang pagpapaputi sa damit matapos sabuyan ng putik. Sa *Ariel,* ipinakita naman na masayang-masaya ang babae na maglaba kahit tambak ang damitan at nilakipan pa ng awiting "*Finally, Ariel happened to me*", na lalong nagpasidhi sa kasayahan ng babae. Hindi na maaalis sa babae ang kaputian at paputian. Mula sa balat hanggang sa damit, laging inaasahan sa babae maging maputi. Niroromantisa kapag dinadahilang babae kasi ang simbolo ng kadalisayan. Samantala, sa isang patalastas ng *Tide*, nilapatan naman ng sayaw ang paglalaba ng kababaihan habang nakasuot ng maiksing palda at *sleeveless* na damit. Lalong naging matingkad ang seksismo dahil nagkaroon ng pagsasapornograpiya. Hindi ito sa paraang may nagtatalik, kundi sa konsumpsyong pangkatawan sa paraang inilalagay sa kaisipan ng lalaki ang babae bilang produktong hindi lamang panlaba, kundi pati sa panseksuwal na pangangailangan.

Dala na rin ito ng paputian. Marahil natabunan ng makabagong lipunan ang kasaysayan at kasarinlan ng kulturang Filipino kaya inaakma sa kaalamang kolonyal ang istandard ng masa. Gayundin, walang babae ang masayang nagsisilbi sa patriyarka habang minamaliit. Ginagamit ang sabong panlaba para magkaroon ng romantisismo sa pagpapasailalim sa kalalakihan. Ang mga patalastas sa sabong panlaba ay pumapaksa sa mga anti-feminismong konsepto na nagpapatingkad sa opresyon at istereotayp sa kababaihan. Naging malaki ang papel ng popularisasyon ng pangmadlang media upang maipalaganap at mapanatili sa mababang kalagayan ang kababaihan.

May relasyon ang paglalagay ng seksismo sa patalastas at ang konsumer nito bilang tagapanood nito. Konektado ang sexistang imaheng inilalagay sa patastas sa mga 'di makataong gawain. Replektibo sa isa't isa ang nilalaman nito. Kung ayos lang sa patalastas ng *Tide, Ariel, Surf* at iba pang sabong panlaba na ipakita ang pagpapahirap sa kababaihan na maglaba ng dumi ng lalaki sa loob ng bahay ay baka maging normal din ang *domestic violence* sa kababaihan. Pinapalagay lang na ang inaakalang tama at katanggap-tanggap dahil sa normalisasyon ng sabong panlaba ay isang pang-aabuso na pala.

Mahalagang magkaroon ng pagsasalba gamit din ang sabong panlaba upang linisin ang seksismong pauna nang itinanim nito sa konsumer. Dapat gamitin ang pangmadlang media at patalastas nang ligtas sa mga idelohiyang mapambansot upang magkaroon ng posibilidad na mabago rin ang kamalayan ng lipunan nang-unti-unti at matamasa ang pantay na pagtingin.

Wala namang mali sa paglalaba, pero ito ay gawaing hindi nangangailangan ng kasarian.