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## Learning Poverty Through the Lens of Grade Four Teachers in the Division of Northern Samar: Inputs for a Learning Recovery Plan

Mat Banagbanag<sup>1\*</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess the understanding of the grade four teachers in the Division of Northern Samar regarding learning poverty. It examined the grade four pupils' reading proficiency levels, grade four teachers' perceptions of learning poverty, its perceived level, contributing factors, current interventions used to solve this issue, and challenges encountered by the grade four teachers regarding this problem. The mixed-method embedded design guided by the Input-Process-Output model type of research was utilized with the grade four teachers in both central and non-central school in every district in the Division of Northern Samar as the respondents. Quantitative data were collected through surveys, while qualitative data insights were drawn from open-ended responses. Findings revealed that the grade four pupils were instructional readers and the grade for teachers were aware of learning poverty which they considered to be at a high level. Teacher-related and pupil-related factors were seen as major contributors, with visual aids identified as the frequently used intervention to solve learning poverty. Challenges such as instructional gaps, behavioral and emotional issues, classroom management, and assessment difficulties were moderately serious. A learning recovery plan was developed in response to these findings.

### INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that significantly influences academic achievement, particularly among learners in the intermediate grades. Among Grade Four learners, the ability to read and comprehend texts is critical as it underpins success across subject areas and future educational progression. Globally, reading comprehension among ten-year-olds has become a pressing concern. UNESCO and the World Bank refer to this as "learning poverty," defined as the inability of children by age ten to read and understand a simple text. This phenomenon underscores the widespread lack of foundational literacy skills necessary for lifelong learning and socio-economic mobility.

Reading comprehension is at the heart of learning poverty. It encompasses not just decoding, but also the ability to understand, interpret, and apply textual information. According to the World Bank (2019), learning poverty signals both a deficiency in basic reading mechanics and a deeper struggle with comprehension. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that without adequate comprehension, reading becomes a rote task, limiting learners' capacity to access content in science, mathematics, and social studies. Consequently, learners who fail to acquire strong comprehension skills are at risk of ongoing academic setbacks and reduced opportunities in later life. Addressing reading comprehension is therefore central to improving education systems and combating learning poverty.

At the Grade Four level, learners are expected to read fluently and engage with complex academic texts. However, teachers frequently report that many learners struggle with reading materials that are age-appropriate.

This is concerning, as Grade Four represents a pivotal transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Comprehension difficulties at this stage may lead to cumulative learning gaps. As Meniano (2016) explains, text comprehension is a multifaceted cognitive process requiring deliberate instruction and support. Research affirms that successful comprehension development is influenced by both school and home environments, and that learners who perform poorly academically often struggle with understanding written texts.

In the Philippine context, the issue of reading proficiency is particularly alarming. The World Bank (2023) reported that 91 percent of Filipino children at late-primary age are not proficient in reading. Although the country's reading literacy score in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed a slight improvement from 340 in 2018 to 347 in 2022, it remains substantially below the global average of 476. PISA 2022 results further indicate that Filipino learners perform below the OECD average, highlighting persistent deficits in reading skills despite policy mandates for equitable and quality education.

At the local level, similar challenges prevail. In the Division of Northern Samar, the 2023 Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) results revealed that nearly 60 percent of Grade Four learners are at the frustration level, indicating an inability to read and understand grade-level texts. Furthermore, the 2024 National Achievement Test placed the division second to the lowest in Region VIII. Despite the implementation of various reading programs, learning poverty continues to pose significant barriers. Notably, few studies have examined teachers' perceptions of this issue—insights that are essential for

<sup>1</sup> Capul Central II Elementary School, Capul District, Division of Northern Samar, Philippines

\* Corresponding author's e-mail: [jshrjhane@gmail.com](mailto:jshrjhane@gmail.com)

the design of effective instructional interventions. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these challenges, with prolonged school closures and modular distance learning underscoring the vital role of teachers in mitigating learning loss. This study, therefore, seeks to understand the factors contributing to low reading proficiency among Grade Four learners and to develop a targeted learning plan to address these persistent challenges.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-method embedded research design within an Input-Process-Output (IPO) framework. Quantitative data served as the primary basis for analysis, supported by qualitative insights gathered from teachers' responses in the open-ended questions. The study was conducted in the 46 school districts of Northern Samar, with one central and one non-central public elementary school selected from each district. The respondents included 230 Grade Four teacher-advisers. Data collection tools consisted of a researcher-made questionnaire composed of six parts, covering reading proficiency levels, teacher perceptions, contributing factors, existing interventions, encountered challenges, and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns and core issues. The variables of the study were structured according to the IPO model: inputs included pupils' reading levels and teachers' perceptions; the process focused on identifying causes of learning poverty and current responses; and the output was a data-informed Learning Recovery Plan.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that the majority of Grade Four pupils in Northern Samar were instructional readers—learners who require teacher support to understand texts. A substantial number of pupils also fell into the frustration and non-reader categories, indicating a deep literacy gap. Teachers demonstrated strong awareness of learning poverty and associated it with pupils' inability to decode or comprehend grade-level texts. They noted that such deficiencies hinder students' performance across all subject areas and affect their academic confidence. Learning poverty was generally perceived as high, with learners struggling to recognize familiar words, follow sentence patterns, and connect ideas within texts. The most significant contributing factors to learning poverty were teacher-related and pupil-related issues. These included limited instructional strategies, insufficient teaching materials, low motivation, and lack of parental involvement. School-related issues, while contributory, were deemed less impactful than the other two. Visual aids emerged as the most commonly used intervention in classrooms, as they helped concretize abstract concepts and sustain pupil attention. However, these interventions were often inconsistent or lacked long-

term planning. Teachers reported moderately serious challenges in implementing reading instruction, including instructional difficulties, emotional and behavioral problems among learners, classroom management issues, and inappropriate assessment practices. They noted that many pupils experienced reading anxiety, lacked engagement, and displayed avoidance behaviors due to repeated academic failures. Assessment tools were also seen as limited in capturing the true reading ability of struggling pupils. Classroom management was affected by disruptive behaviors often rooted in reading frustration, and these behavioral issues further strained teachers already burdened by non-teaching duties. These findings underline the multidimensional nature of learning poverty, encompassing academic, emotional, social, and environmental aspects.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that learning poverty among Grade Four pupils in the Division of Northern Samar is a serious and urgent issue. While teachers are aware of and actively respond to the literacy gaps in their classrooms, many structural and instructional barriers persist. The factors contributing to learning poverty are complex and interrelated, spanning teacher competence, home environment, resource limitations, and pupil attitudes. Existing interventions, though useful, are often informal and lack sustainability. Addressing this multifaceted issue requires a holistic approach. To this end, a Learning Recovery Plan was developed as the major output of the study, incorporating differentiated instruction, teacher training, structured remediation programs, enhanced parental involvement, regular progress monitoring, and the use of localized teaching materials.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended institutionalizing the Learning Recovery Plan across the Division of Northern Samar. Regular training should be provided for teachers focusing on literacy instruction and inclusive classroom strategies. Stronger home-school partnerships are essential, particularly through parent workshops and literacy activities that extend into the home environment. More locally relevant reading materials should be developed and made accessible in classrooms. Monitoring tools must be improved to accurately track learners' reading development. Finally, a cross-sectoral collaboration involving the Department of Education, local government units, and community organizations is necessary to ensure a sustained and coordinated response to learning poverty.

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