



Literacy Information in the Philippines

by Dr. Norma L. Salcedo

The 2003 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) is a national survey that gathers information on basic and functional literacy status of the population which will be used as basis of education policies and programs that will improve the coverage and quality of education and literacy in the country. It is the third in a series of functional literacy surveys conducted in 1989 and 1994.

The 2003 FLEMMS is conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in coordination with the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) and the Department of Education (DepEd).

The LCC provides overall coordination in policy formulation and program implementation of all inter-agency activities to achieve the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). With LCC at the helm, the DepEd, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Philippine Information Agency (PIA), Philippine Normal University (PNU), Senate, House of Representative, and Non-Government Organization (NGO) and the agencies involved in the promotion of literacy from the private and government sectors, the Philippines supports UNLD's goal to increase global literacy levels by 50% by 2015.

2003 FLEMMS Highlights

A. Highest Educational Attainment

The largest proportion of Filipinos aged 6 years and older were elementary graders. According to the 2003 FLEMMS, 29% of the estimated 69 million population 6 years old and above in 2003, or three out of 10 persons in that age group, have attended an elementary school but did not complete

the elementary level. One in every 10 had no formal education (9.0%).

This proportion is somewhat high despite the government's commitment to provide basic education to all Filipinos. Those who have graduated from an elementary school but did not proceed to a secondary level comprised 11 percent. Sixteen percent have reached but did not finish high school level while another 16 percent have finished high school level. Likewise, 16 percent either have reached but did not complete college level (8.3%) or have actually finished college or any higher level of education (8.0%).

B. Attendance in School

Two-thirds of the estimated 34 million population 6 to 24 years old, were attending school during the school year covering June 2003 to March or April 2004, or semester covering November 2003 to March or April 2004.

In Western Visayas (Region VI), Bicol (Region V), CAR, Cagayan Valley (Region II), and Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan (MIMAROPA), approximately seven out of 10 children and youth were enrolled during the cited school year or semester. In ARMM, only about five in every 10 children and youth were enrolled.

C. Net Enrollment Ratio

The net enrollment ratio for the primary school age children or the ratio of the number of children 6 to 11 years old who were enrolled in elementary grades to the total number of children in this age group is around 82 percent.

The net enrollment ratios for the population in the secondary school ages and those in the tertiary school ages are much lower. Approximately six out of 10 persons of secondary school ages, or persons aged 12 to 15 years were enrolled in high school. Only one-fifth of those in the tertiary school ages or persons aged 16 to 24 years were attending college. The net enrollment ratio among females is generally higher than males.

D. Mode of Travel to School

The children's mode of travel to school shows that more than half of the students aged 6 to 24 years went to school by walking (54.5%). Tricycle and jeepney were also commonly used. Two out of five students either took a tricycle or a jeepney.

E. Reason for not Attending School

Of the 34 million population aged 6-24, 34 percent or 11.6 million were not attending school. Of this number, 30 percent were not attending school mainly because they were working or looking for work, 22 percent lacked interest in going to school and 20 percent could not afford high cost of education.

F. Basic or Simple Literacy

Of the estimated 62 million Filipinos 10 years old and over, around 93 percent were basically literate. Basic or simple literacy is the ability of a person to read and write with understanding a simple message in any language or dialect.

The basic literacy rate in 2003 is similar to the 1994 rate of 94 percent. The basic literacy rate among females (94.3%) is higher compared to their male counterpart (92.6%).

G. Functional Literacy

A self-administered functional literacy questionnaire was accomplished by persons 10 to 64 years old in order to determine their literacy status. The 2003 FLEMMS revealed a functional literacy rate which is similar to the 1994 rate of 84 percent. Of the estimated 58 million Filipinos 10 to 64 years old, around 49 million were functionally literate. The functional literacy rate among females is higher than among males (86.3% vs. 81.9%).

Survey results also show that seven out of 10 persons aged 10 to 64 years who were poor were functionally literate compared to nine out of 10 among the non-poor.

H. Mass Media

One question in the FLEMMS self-administered questionnaires asked the respondents to choose which among the different forms of mass media can give him or her knowledge and information.

Among the 12 different forms of mass media, TV (61.8%), radio (56.7%), and newspaper (46.5%) were most commonly cited by the respondents as possible sources of knowledge and information to them. Other forms of mass

media reported by at least two in every 10 respondents are magazine/book (35.7%), meetings of barangay, church and other organizations (32.2%), and computer/internet (20.0%).

I. Attendance in Non-Formal Training

Of the 51 million population 15 years old and over, 19 percent (9.7 million) have attended a livelihood adult literacy program or non-formal training. Non-formal training includes basic literacy, functional literacy, livelihood training, basic vocational training, citizenship training, values development and leadership training. Of those who attended livelihood training, 18 percent participated in values development training, and 13 percent joined leadership training.

Strategic Partners

The national campaign against illiteracy, as designed by the LCC, is built on the concept of a grand alliance among the public education sector, the private sector, and the local government unit with the local authorities assuming full leadership and responsibility to make the program sustainable. The Council is set to review and evaluate its program and hopefully, take it to the next level of advocacy—total local government involvement.

To cultivate strategic partnerships with local governments, the Council undertook an awards program that is calculated to cultivate literacy advocacy among the local government units (LGUs) and harness local power and resources to combat illiteracy.

One success story is Antipolo City which made history by winning the first ever Hall of Fame Award for the Most Outstanding Local Government Unit category. For three consecutive years, from 2002-2004, Antipolo City was declared as the Most Outstanding Local Government Unit for the Component City category. As a result, Antipolo City helped the 5-year-old Outstanding Literacy Program Awards establish a significant benchmark in the drive to eradicate illiteracy in the Philippines. This also proves that strong and sustained support from LGUs greatly helps in achieving the desired literacy results.

Although this is a significant stride in the literacy program, a more concerted effort among educators, learners, communities, and the government is still needed to raise the level of literacy in the country.

DR. NORMA L. SALCEDO is the head of the Literacy Coordinating Council (LCC) Secretariat.

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