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## Research Article

### Functional Literacy Level of Officials in Selected Barangays: Basis for an Extension Project

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#### ABSTRACT

This research investigates the functional literacy levels of barangay officials in selected agricultural communities within Guagua, Pampanga, aiming to design an extension program that improves governance effectiveness. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, the study utilizes a modified DepEd-ALS functional literacy test to evaluate reading, writing, and numeracy competencies among 30 elected officials across Ascom, Pulungmasle, and Maquiapo. The findings reveal a significant gap between academic qualifications and practical literacy skills, with over 36% of respondents classified at the beginning literacy level. This underscores the need for targeted interventions, especially in remote areas with limited access to education.

The study contextualizes functional literacy as a pivotal element for public service delivery, transparency, and civic engagement. Results show that while 80% of respondents attained college education, their functional abilities in written communication, budgeting, and digital tasks vary significantly. The proposed extension program is a six-week, module-based training covering reading, writing, numeracy, communication, and digital literacy. Recommendations include integrating technological tools, routine assessments, and peer mentorship to sustain improvements. Ultimately, enhancing functional literacy is framed not just as a personal upgrade for officials, but as a foundational strategy for community empowerment, responsive governance, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Functional literacy, Extension program, Geographical location, Governance*

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#### Introduction

Functional literacy significantly impacts public service by enhancing citizens' ability to engage with governmental processes and policies. It empowers individuals to read, write, and perform calculations necessary for

informed decision-making and participation in civic duties, ultimately fostering a more informed electorate. In addition, functional literacy equips individuals with skills necessary for employment that can reduce dependency

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and promotes decision-making abilities. Moreover, Cocchiarella (2018) stated in his article that we need functional literacy to have a functional society.

Functional literacy refers to the capacity of a person to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community's development. It refers to the ability of an individual to use reading, writing and computational skills in daily situations. It goes beyond basic literacy, that is reading and writing but the capacity to apply these skills for engagement and interaction. According to National Statistics Authority defines functional literacy as the level of literacy which includes not only reading and writing but also numeracy skills that would help people cope with the daily demands of life. According to Demirbilek & Keser (2023), functional literacy is the learning of knowledge and skills for vital necessities as a higher level of basic literacy and then the operational use of this information in individual, socio-cultural, or economic fields. Whereas, Popovic (2014) stated that literacy makes us safer, able to be active citizens and critically observe the reality. Only functionally literate individual can be critical when accepting different types of texts, he meets daily in a variety of media and protect himself from negative messages. He also mentioned that functional illiterate person is easily manipulated and unfortunately, literacy can be seen as a tool of power and oppression that legitimizes opinion, the rights and laws of the dominant group as means to create an opinion. Surwanti, D. & Hikmah, I. (2019), cited on their research that, functional literacy is a set of real skills: reading and writing, which in the context of a globalized world, means from a simple process of acquiring basic cognitive skills to use these skills by contributing to socio-economic development, to develop capacity for social awareness and critical reflection as a basis for personal and social change (UNESCO, 2015).

Functional literacy can be situated from educational, social or political viewpoints. A functionally literate person is an individual who is

able to read and write well enough to understand any signs, ads, newspaper headlines, and able to fill out job applications, make shopping lists, and write (Groenestijn, 2003). A functionally literate person must be able to fulfil moral obligations including being able to provide for themselves in the society (Johnson, 2016). Higher literacy ability is resulted in greater work productivity and higher incomes especially in the context of employment and economic development (Bravo, Contreras, & Larranaga, 2002 and Edwards & Corson, 1997). Still in use today, UNESCO adopted a definition of functional literacy that states; a person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.

Functional literacy is the ability to interpret and decode written words and symbols to carry out daily living activities needed to secure and maintain a home and employment, and manage one's health conditions (Grajo & Gutman, 2019). Activities requiring functional literacy include money management, medication and health management, navigating public transportation systems, shopping and meal preparation, clothing care, and employment seeking—all critical skills needed to transition from the street or shelter into supported housing. Without such skills—and the functional literacy skills supporting community participation—homeless adults have little chance of emerging from the cycle of chronic homelessness and dependency on federal and state subsidy programs (Johnstone, Parsell, Jetten, Dingle, & Walter, 2016).

Functional literacy is the practical skill set needed to read, write, and do math for real-life purposes, so people can function effectively in their community. It is essential for individuals to have mathematical knowledge, reading and writing skills, or analytical abilities to have functioning businesses, governments, or communities. In other words, we need functional literacy to have a functional society. With the role of barangay officials in our society, it is a must that they do possess a sense of functional

literacy, in order that they could better perform their duties as public servants.

Geographical location significantly influences the educational opportunities available to public officials, particularly in rural areas. Officials in remote regions often face challenges such as limited access to quality schools, inadequate resources, and a shortage of qualified teachers, which can hinder their educational attainment. In the study of Drescher, et.al, (2022), which sought to find the educational opportunity between rural and non-rural, their results suggested that rural students have, on average, modestly higher third-grade achievement but modestly lower learning rates than non-rural students. In addition, the outcomes of students in rural communities vary significantly across several dimensions, including by students' socioeconomic and racial-ethnic backgrounds, region, degree of geographic isolation from larger and denser communities, and type of business activities underpinning their local economies. Another study of Jivinius, J. (2015), investigated the role of geographical location to academic performance of students, concluded that distance results into negative impacts to academic performance of students. Geographical factors hinders students to finish their students. In this study researchers had investigated that a number of the elected officials in the barangay selected do lack education and displayed low level in their functional literacy rate. This triggered the researchers to a question that, does functional literacy affects the performance of our public officials due to lack of education? In the recent study of Kindl & Lenhard (2023), stated that a significant portion of the working-age population has only rudimentary literacy skills. Many people who are functionally illiterate have problems to perform basic daily tasks and to participate in society.

Barangay officials are elected public servants of our community, the Punong barangay or the barangay chairperson as the top most official is aided by the Sangguniang Barangay, whose members are called barangay council are also elected. In the Philippines' local government system, barangay officials play crucial roles. The barangay being the basic and smallest administrative division in the country,

serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of government policies, plans, programs, projects and activities in the community. The barangay consists of key positions; Barangay Captain or Punong Barangay, Barangay councillors or the Kagawad, Barangay Secretary, Barangay Treasurer, SK Chairman and the Barangay Tanod. These officials work together to ensure the smooth functioning of the barangay, addressing the needs of their constituents and promoting welfare of their community. They are elected by the residents of the barangay and serve a term of three years. Their roles and responsibilities are defined by the Local Government Code of the Philippines.

To be elected as one of the compositions of barangay officials, one needs to be a Filipino citizen must be at least 18 years old on the election day, must be a registered voter in the barangay where they intend to run for office, must be a resident of the barangay for at least one year prior to the election, must be able to read and write Filipino or any other local language or dialect, must not have been convicted of any crime involving moral turpitude. These are the required qualifications when you run for an office in the barangay. Looking at its qualifications, being able to read and write are the basic skills that requires to be elected. A question on how could barangay officials could run a political community in the absence of functional literacy.

In some geographical locations, barangay officials were elected even not completing tertiary education, their willingness to serve is always taken in consideration, often times there are the officials located in far-flung barrios where survival is their priority, still their aim to serve was taken in consideration for voters of the barangay to elect them as officials of the community. Functional literacy plays an important role in an individual's work performance. The communication skills enable individuals to effectively interact with colleagues, clients and superiors. It also allows employees to understand written instructions, emails, reports and other work-related documents. Good communication helps prevent misunderstandings, improves teamwork and enhances overall productivity. Being functional literate allows

employees to understand and follow instructions accurately. They can read and comprehend work-related materials, such as manuals, guidelines, and procedures, which are essential for performing tasks efficiently. This reduces errors, enhances productivity, and ensures that work is completed in a timely manner. Functional literacy involves critical thinking skills, which are crucial for problem-solving and decision-making in the workplace. Employees who can read and analyze information effectively are better equipped to identify issues, evaluate options, and make informed decisions. This ability contributes to problem-solving, innovation, and overall work effectiveness.

Functional literacy involves critical thinking skills, which are crucial for problem-solving and decision-making in the workplace. Employees who can read and analyze information effectively are better equipped to identify issues, evaluate options, and make informed decisions. This ability contributes to problem-solving, innovation, and overall work effectiveness. Functional literacy promotes a culture of continuous learning in the workplace. Employees who can read and comprehend information easily are more likely to engage in self-directed learning, seek out new knowledge, and stay updated with industry trends. This willingness to learn and adapt enhances professional growth and contributes to career advancement. In the study of Bravo et.al, (2002) stated that higher literacy ability is linked to greater work productivity and higher incomes for low-trained workers.

Functional literacy is a crucial competency for barangay officials, as it directly impacts their governance efficiency and ability to serve their communities effectively. These officials act as the bridge between the government and the grassroots, making functional literacy essential for clear communication. With adequate literacy, they can draft resolutions, interpret legal documents, and explain policies to constituents of varying educational backgrounds. Without these skills, misunderstandings and inefficiencies can arise, hindering progress.

Moreover, functional literacy ensures transparent governance and accountability, which are essential in maintaining public trust.

Barangay officials with strong literacy skills can create accurate records, financial statements, and reports while meeting compliance requirements. Numeracy, an integral part of functional literacy, allows them to manage budgets, allocate resources efficiently, and ensure public funds are used appropriately. These skills not only promote trust but also protect officials from financial mismanagement risks.

In addition, literacy equips barangay officials to bridge the digital divide, especially as governance increasingly relies on digital tools and platforms. Through digital literacy, they can navigate government systems, communicate online, and use technology to enhance service delivery, such as disaster response or project monitoring. These competencies are particularly vital in areas where officials must address local challenges like urban congestion, rural development, or disaster risks, emphasizing how functional literacy helps meet specific community needs.

On the other hand, lacking functional literacy can hinder work performance like miscommunication. Poor reading and writing skills can lead to misinterpretation of instructions, resulting in errors, delays, and misunderstandings among team members. Limited literacy skills can slow down work processes as employees struggle to comprehend written materials, leading to decreased productivity and efficiency.

Moreover, problems may arise when public officials lack education and are functional illiterate, these significant problems may lead to inefficient governance, corruption and mismanagement, limited public engagement and inadequate policy implementation (Parikka, 2024).

Extension projects play a critical role in addressing gaps in barangay officials' functional literacy. These programs can provide targeted training in communication, resource management, and digital literacy, enabling officials to perform their duties more effectively. By enhancing these skills, extension projects empower barangay officials to foster better community outcomes, support inclusive governance, and drive sustainable development in their respective areas.

## Objectives

The general aim of the study was to propose an extension project that will improve the functional literacy of the barangay officials. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. How may the demographic profile of the barangay officials be described in terms of:
  - a. Age
  - b. Gender
  - c. Location
  - d. Educational Attainment
2. How may the level of functional literacy of Barangay officials be described?
3. Based on the results, what project can be proposed to improve the functional literacy level of the barangay officials

## Conceptual Framework

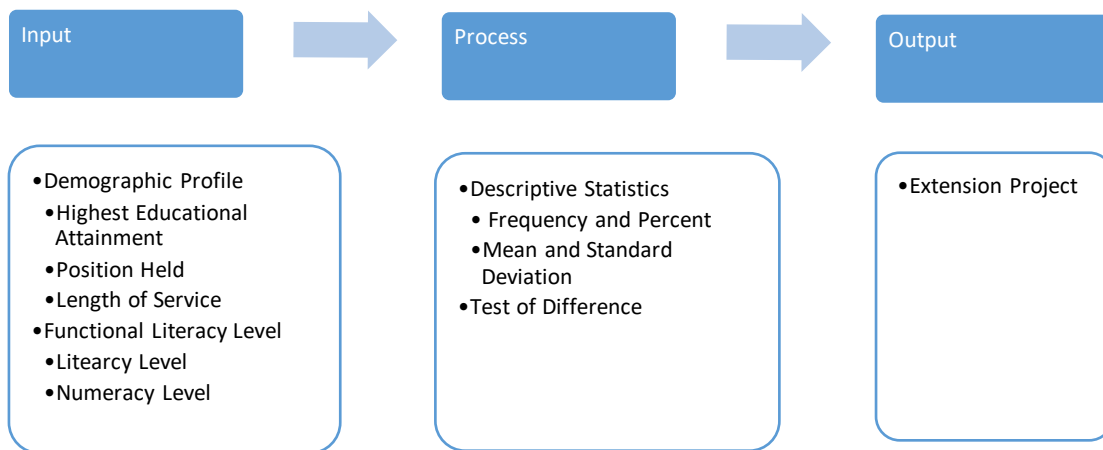


Figure 1: Paradigm of the Study

**Figure 1** shows the paradigm of the study. It can be seen on the table that the present study describe the demographic profile and functional literacy of the barangay officials to come-up with an extension project to improve the functional literacy of the barangay officials.

## Methods

### Research Design

In this study, a quantitative descriptive research design is utilized to describe the demographic profile and functional literacy level of the barangay officials. According to Creswell and Clark (2017), the quantitative approach facilitates the collection of numerical data to numerically describe the functional literacy of the barangay officials. Concurrently, a comparative approach is employed to describe the difference on the functional literacy level of barangay officials in terms of their demographic profile.

### Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study are the current barangay officials with distinct

geographical location in Guagua Pampanga. Currently, these are agricultural barangays in Guagua which is subdivided into 4 districts (Población, Pangulo, Locion and Betis). With a small population of, a larger sample size is generally recommended, these barangays were selected due to geographical locations that affects educational attainment of their barangay officials were selected as the respondents of the study.

### Instrument

The study employed a modified version of the Functional Literacy for Adults test from DepEd-ALS, specifically tailored to assess the literacy and numeracy competencies of barangay officials based on their actual roles and responsibilities. The instrument was structured to include demographic profiling, literacy evaluation, and numeracy assessment, and was validated by content experts to ensure its contextual relevance and reliability. A total of 30 barangay officials participated in the study, se-

lected from three agriculturally based barangays within Guagua, Pampanga: Pulungmasle (12 respondents), Ascomo (9 respondents), and Maquiapo (9 respondents). These locations were chosen due to their geographical isolation and challenges in accessing formal education, which are considered contributing factors to the functional literacy levels among elected officials in the area.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data gathering procedure in the study involves the collection of necessary information thru survey questionnaire. The study took place on the respective barangays of the respondents. First the research sought the approval on the conduct of the study school authorities. Second, the researcher explained the purpose and objectives of the study to the respondents and will seek their willingness to be participate on the said study with the assurance that the data collected will only be used in accordance with the Data Privacy act of 2012. Third, the researcher analyzed the data using

appropriate statistical tools. Finally, the result of the study was used to propose an extension project that will improve the functional literacy of the barangay officials

### **Ethical Considerations**

Respecting confidentiality, obtaining informed permission, and making it clear that participation is voluntary are all necessary to sustain ethical standards during the consultations. Building trust among participants is facilitated by open communication about the goal and use of the information obtained. The dedication to ethical behavior is further demonstrated by acknowledging and respecting participants' professional skills, handling conflicts of interest, and putting strong data security measures in place.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section of the study presents the results and discussion which investigated the functional literacy of the barangay officials that will be the basis for an extension project.

### **Demographic Profile**

*Table 1: Respondents' Age*

Age	Frequency	Percent
21-30 Years Old	2	6.67
31-40 Years Old	4	13.33
41-50 Years Old	5	16.67
51 years old and Above	19	63.33
Total	30	100

Table 1 shows the Age Distribution of the Respondents. It can be seen on the table that 63.33% of the respondents are 51 years old and above. In addition, 16.67% of the respondents is between 41-50 years old. Furthermore, 4 out of 30 respondents age is between 31-40 years old and 6.67% of the re-

spondent is between 20-31 years old. The result shows that public officials are generally older. As what Stockemer & Sundstorm (2023) stated in their research, people in the political decision-making across the globe tend to be much older than the average voter.

*Table 2: Respondents' Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	15	50
Female	15	50
Total	30	100

Table 2 shows the Gender Distribution of the Respondents. It can be gleaned on the table that half of the respondents are male, and the other half are females. The role of gender in public service is multi-faceted, influencing representation, decision-making and policy

outcomes. In today's era, women has taken a representation in public office. In the study Venancia, N., (2018), women were rated as having very satisfactory level of performance in the areas of implementation, legislation, peace-keeping and fiscal management.

*Table 3: Respondents' Location*

Barangay	Frequency	Percent
Ascomom	9	30
Pulungmasle	12	40
Maquiapo	9	30
Total	30	100

Table 3 shows the residency of the Respondents. It can be seen on the table that 40% of the respondents are from

Pulungmasle. In addition, 30% of the respondents are from Ascomom while the remaining 30% are from Maquiapo.

*Table 4: Educational Attainment*

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	0	0
Secondary	5	16.67
College	24	80.00
Vocational	1	3.33
Total	30	100

Table 4 shows the Highest Educational Attainment of the respondents. It can be seen on the table that 80% of the respondents are College Graduates. In addition, 16.67% completed Secondary Level. Furthermore, 1 out of

30 respondents finished vocational course. Similarly, Venancia, N. (2018) has concluded that public officials with higher educational attainment have better performance

*Table 5: Proficiency Level (Functional Literacy Test)*

Score	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description
74% and Below (Beginning)	11	36.67	75	6	Developing
75-79 (Developing)	7	23.33			
80-84 (Approaching Proficiency)	9	30			
85-89 (Proficiency)	3	10			
90% and Above (Advance)	0	0			
Total	30	100			

The proficiency level of the respondents in terms of Literacy is reflected in table 5. It can be seen on the table that 36.67% of the respondents are beginning. Further, 30% of the respondents are approaching proficiency. On the other hand, 7 out of 30 respondents are in

developing level. Lastly, 10% of the respondents are proficient. It could be inferred that a greater percentage of the public officials yielded a higher percentage in beginning level as compared with the other level. As what is mentioned when public officials lack education

and are functional illiterate, these significant problems may lead to inefficient governance, corruption and mismanagement, limited public engagement and inadequate policy implementation (Parikka, 2024).

## Proposed Extension Program

### *A Functional Literacy Extension Program for Barangay Officials*

**Program Overview:** This program aims to equip barangay officials with the essential functional literacy skills necessary to effectively serve their constituents and contribute to community development. By enhancing their literacy abilities, we aim to improve their communication, decision-making, and overall effectiveness in fulfilling their official duties.

#### Program Objectives:

1- Enhance reading and comprehension skills: Participants will develop the ability to effectively read and understand official documents, reports, and community-related materials. - Improve writing skills: Participants will learn to write clear, concise, and accurate reports, letters, and other official documents.

2- Develop numeracy skills: Participants will gain a better understanding of basic mathematical concepts and their application in budgeting, planning, and data analysis.

3 - Enhance communication skills: Participants will learn effective communication techniques, including active listening, public speaking, and conflict resolution.

4- Promote digital literacy: Participants will be introduced to basic computer skills and online resources relevant to their roles. Program Structure:

**Duration:** 6 weeks, with sessions held twice a week for 2 hours each.

**Target Audience:** All barangay officials, including council members, secretaries, treasurers, and other elected officials.

**Methodology:** A blended learning approach combining interactive workshops, group discussions, practical exercises, and individual coaching.

**Curriculum:** The program will cover the following modules:

A- Reading and Comprehension: Techniques for reading and understanding official documents, reports, and community data.

B - Writing Skills: Effective writing techniques for official correspondence, reports, and minutes of meetings.

C- Numeracy Skills: Basic mathematical concepts and their application in budgeting, planning, and data analysis.

D- Communication Skills: Active listening, public speaking, conflict resolution, and effective communication strategies.

E- Digital Literacy: Basic computer skills, online resources, and utilizing digital platforms for official purposes.

#### Program Benefits:

- Improved service delivery: Barangay officials will be better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of their constituents.
- Enhanced decision-making: Officials will be able to analyze information and make informed decisions based on accurate data. - Increased transparency and accountability: Improved communication and documentation will enhance transparency and accountability within the barangay.
- Empowered communities: A more literate and informed barangay leadership will contribute to a more empowered and engaged community. Program Resources: -

**Qualified facilitators:** Experienced educators and trainers with expertise in functional literacy and community development.

- Interactive learning materials: Engaging and relevant materials tailored to the needs of barangay officials.
- Digital resources: Access to online platforms and tools for learning and communication.
- Sustainability: - Follow-up support: Regular check-ins and workshops to reinforce learning and address ongoing challenges.
- Community engagement: Encourage barangay officials to share their knowledge and skills with constituents.
- Partnerships: Collaborate with local organizations and institutions to provide ongoing support and resources.



**Call to Action:** We invite all barangay officials to join this empowering program and contribute to a more literate and informed community. Together, we can build a brighter future for our barangays.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The functional literacy assessment revealed that 36.67% of barangay officials were classified under the "Beginning" level, indicating basic challenges in reading, writing, and numeracy. Additionally, 23.33% fell within the "Developing" category, while 30% were "Approaching Proficiency" and only 10% reached the "Proficient" level. No respondents achieved an "Advanced" classification. These results highlight a concerning gap between academic attainment since 80% of respondents are college graduates and their practical application of literacy skills in governance-related tasks. This discrepancy has major implications, such as inefficiencies in service delivery due to poor documentation, weak financial oversight from low numeracy skills, and difficulty complying with administrative reporting requirements. Moreover, officials with limited literacy face challenges navigating digital platforms essential for modern governance. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to ensure public officials can perform their duties effectively and uphold transparent, responsive leadership.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Literacy and Numeracy Training Program with Technological Intervention

A customized training program should be developed to enhance the functional literacy and numeracy skills of barangay officials. This initiative can incorporate real-world applications relevant to their roles, such as budget management, report writing, and the interpretation of official documents. To strengthen its impact, technological tools such as e-learning platforms, mobile applications, and digital worksheets can be integrated into the training. These tools can offer interactive and flexible learning opportunities, making the

program more engaging and accessible for participants.

#### 2. Regular Assessment and Monitoring using Digital Tools:

To ensure the effectiveness of the training, regular assessments should be conducted to monitor the progress of barangay officials. A baseline assessment before the program, followed by periodic evaluations, can identify improvements and areas needing further attention. Post-assessments conducted six months after the training can provide critical insights into long-term impacts. Digital tools such as online quizzes, learning management systems, and performance dashboards can be employed to simplify data collection and analysis, ensuring timely feedback and adjustments to the training.

#### 3. Capacity Building Workshops:

Workshops on leadership and governance should integrate literacy and numeracy skill-building, emphasizing practical applications like policy drafting, project planning, and resource management. These workshops can be enhanced by incorporating multimedia presentations, virtual simulations, and collaborative tools like shared documents and forums. Technology can make the workshops more dynamic and allow participants to practice skills in a simulated environment, improving retention and application.

#### 4. Peer Mentorship Program:

Establish a peer mentorship program where barangay officials who are proficient in literacy and numeracy can guide and support those who are at the "Beginning" or "Developing" levels. This approach encourages collaborative learning and knowledge sharing within the community.

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