THE GROWING POPULATION OF NON-READERS IN HIGH SCHOOL

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Reading is one of the macro skills that everyone should learn. It is the way of decoding symbols to come up with a meaning, so that everyone should shift the view of mastery beyond decoding to include critical reading and meaning construction. It serves as the foundation in learning the other skills. Hence, making every child a competent reader is the first aim of the teachers specifically for those who are teaching in the early grades of elementary. Through reading, children may acquire a language, enhance their communication skills and may broaden their knowledge which are necessary as they step up to the other grade levels. Elementary teachers are training every pupil to learn how to read from distinguishing the correct sounds and checking the comprehension. Yet, even though elementary teachers are focusing the students in reading, there are still students who are entering in high school who do not know how to read.

In the article written by Estanislao (2019), the Supervising Education Program Specialist of Department of Education, Jocelyn Taguinayo, said that DepEd has enough policies about reading, and they are reviewing and updating it every two to three years for its development. They are giving mandates to the best that they can to ensure that no nonreaders could graduate in the elementary levels. Taguinayo also emphasized that the teachers could identify the weakness in reading of the students in as early as the first quarter. Therefore, they could tailor appropriate remedies or solutions towards the learners’ reading problems. In the other article written by Estanislao (2018), many principals stated that some of the public school teachers are the factors why there are existing nonreaders in the high school nowadays. They are saying that some public school teachers are lacking of dedication and they are not doing their jobs well. Even if they are
swamped with activities specifically the redundant paper works, public school teachers cannot blame the lack of time to administer reading interventions since that is a part of their job. With these statements, teachers are becoming the reasons why the population of nonreaders in high school are growing.

The Department of Education was aware that there were high school students who are classified as nonreaders or categorized as frustrating readers, but they didn’t take it as a big deal until the media has started to pay attention towards the problem. GMA Network presented some episodes in their programs “Bawal ang Pasaway” and “I-Witness” about the students’ reading problem and the quality of education in the country. In the documentary conducted by David (2018), there was a class in Sauyo High School in Quezon City where the students did not know how to read, how to write, or how to identify the colors. The class was consisted of 29 students who had reached Grade 7 even if they were not deserving to be in high school. Based on the interview, high school teachers believed that the elementary teachers were somehow blamed, for they promoted the students even if they had not mastered the lessons in Grade 1. This instance is not only the problem of Sauyo High School, for there are good number of high schools which are encountering nonreaders. According to the comprehensive statistics conducted by the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media or FLEMMS (2013), there are approximately 93.6% literacy rate in the country where 91.1% students with the age bracket of 10 to 14 are said to have an ability to read and write, yet there is only 54.8% of them who can understand what they are reading and writing.

There are policies the Department of Education has mandated to ensure that every Filipino child may learn how to read. They imposed the “No Read, No Move” policy for Grade 1 where pupils could not promote or move to the higher grade if they were not able to read. This policy caused the stakeholders to cooperate, and to do whatever they could to ensure that the children would not get stuck in the first grade. Yet, this policy was scrapped and replaced by the program, Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP).
This program was issued to equip elementary pupils with strategic reading and writing skills. It aims to eliminate drop-out rates and repetition in the first three-grades of the students. According to Mendoza (2011), ECARP distinguishes the reading proficiency level of the public elementary students in both English and Filipino first, before designing some appropriate interventions or tools to make the students an independent young readers and writers.

The result of the literacy rate in the country is indeed alarming specifically with regard to the growing population of nonreaders in high school. All teachers are reading teachers. Teaching in reading should not be burdened only by the early grade teachers or to the language teachers, but it should be the responsible of all teachers since every class needs reading to employ for the students’ learning. There will be a better quality of educational system that produces globally competitive students who are literate specifically in reading if there will be some interventions to develop in solving the problem.

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