

**TWENTIETH CONGRESS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
First Regular Session**

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25 JUL 15 P1:46

SENATE

S.B. No. 631

RECEIVED BY: 

Introduced by SENATOR WIN GATCHALIAN

**AN ACT
DIGITIZING ALL BOOKS NECESSARY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION,
ESTABLISHING THE PHILIPPINE ONLINE LIBRARY, AND
APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR**

EXPLANATORY NOTE

The 1987 Constitution mandates the State to establish, maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of education relevant to the needs of the people and society. Consistent with this declaration, the State shall ensure that its citizens are computer literate and are provided access to an increasingly digitized world. Thus, the State shall provide its citizens with the opportunity to increase their adaptability to information and communications technology, and to enhance their learning experience by providing access to digitized copies of textbooks and reference books necessary for the provision of quality elementary and secondary education.

The 2024 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) – the seventh in the series of functional literacy surveys conducted

since 1989 by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)¹, and its precursor the National Statistics Office – found that 93.1% of Filipinos aged 10 to 64 years are considered basically literate. Among those aged five years and older, the basic literacy rate is slightly lower at 90%.² However, despite the national basic literacy rate of 93.1% for the 10 to 64 age group, only 70.8% of the population is considered functionally literate.³ This implies the need for more accessible and relevant educational resources that can promote higher order thinking skills and strengthen the literacy skills of our learners, starting from the elementary and secondary levels.

Technology continues to play an essential role to deliver education to the learners outside of school. However, many children in low-income⁴ countries, including the Philippines, did not participate or have difficulty in accessing and participating in remote learning, which has led to significant losses in learning.⁵ This shows that access to online educational resources in the country is scarce. Digitized textbooks and reference books, when made widely available through a government-operated e-library, can ensure that learners, especially those in underserved or geographically isolated areas, can have access to up-to-date learning materials and bridge educational gaps thereby improving functional literacy among Filipinos.

A notable example of a successful government-operated e-library is the Socioeconomic Research Portal for the Philippines (SERP-P)⁶, which is designed and maintained by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS). SERP-P is an online knowledge resource that contains socioeconomic studies and materials produced by the PIDS and other academic and research

¹<https://psa.gov.ph/content/every-10-filipinos-9-have-basic-literacy-while-7-have-functional-literacy?vcode=110>

² Senate Committee on Basic Education analysis based on the 2024 FLEMMS data.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/edutech>

⁵ *Ibid.*

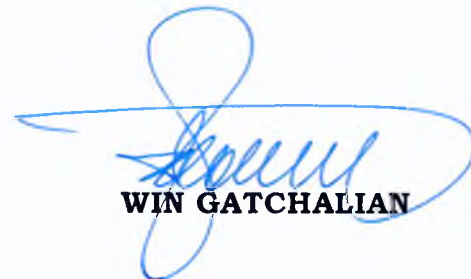
⁶ <https://serp-p.pids.gov.ph>

institutions in the country.⁷ The success of the SERP-P demonstrates the feasibility of a centralized digital portal.

This bill aims to establish the Philippine Online Library, a centralized digital portal, which will emerge as a vital pathway to high-quality e-books and educational content as it will be the repository of the digitized copy of all textbooks and reference materials necessary for the public education of our elementary and secondary learners. It envisions an entire online library of essential reading materials easily accessible to all learners for free and without disruption.

The digital divide is an information divide. This centralized digital portal will open up a new channel to the universe of knowledge and information that will enable learners to access a broader range of textbooks and reference books to help them cope with learning loss and for teachers to reach out to marginalized learners, thus connecting cultures across geographical and social boundaries.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate passage of this bill is highly recommended.



WIN GATCHALIAN

⁷ <https://cids.up.edu.ph/serp-p-and-pids/>

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*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in
Congress assembled:*

1 Section 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “*Philippine Online*
2 *Library Act*”.

3
4 Sec. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is the policy of the State to establish,
5 maintain, and support a complete, adequate, and integrated system of
6 education relevant to the needs of the people and society. The State shall also
7 ensure that its citizens are computer literate and are provided access to an
8 increasingly digitized world. Thus, the State shall provide its citizens with the
9 opportunity to increase their adaptability to information and
10 communications technology, and to enhance their learning experience by
11 providing access to digitized copies of textbooks and reference books
12 necessary for the provision of quality elementary and secondary education.

1 Sec. 3. *Philippine Online Library.* – The Department of Education
2 (DepEd) shall create a digitized copy of all textbooks and reference books it
3 deems necessary for the public education of Philippine elementary and
4 secondary learners: *Provided*, That the DepEd shall ensure that the necessary
5 authorization shall be obtained from the authors or publishers, in accordance
6 with existing intellectual property laws. The digitized copy of all textbooks and
7 reference books shall be compiled in the Philippine Online Library which shall
8 be jointly managed by the DepEd and the Department of Information and
9 Communications Technology (DICT).

10
11 Sec. 4. *Provision for Access to the Digitized Copies of Textbooks.* – The
12 DepEd shall ensure access to the digitized copies of textbooks and reference
13 books by providing computers, laptops, or other appropriate devices to all
14 elementary and secondary public schools nationwide. Similarly, in order to
15 ensure access to the digitized copies of textbooks, the DICT shall provide free,
16 reliable, and secure internet access to each elementary and secondary public
17 school pursuant to the provisions of Republic Act No. 10929 or the “Free
18 Internet Access in Public Places Act”.

19
20 Sec. 5. *Recycling of Computers.* – In order to offset expenses related to
21 the procurement of computers, laptops, or other appropriate devices
22 necessary for the implementation of the provisions of this Act, national
23 government agencies, government-owned and controlled corporations, and
24 other government financial institutions which have procured new computers
25 shall endorse their old units to the DICT to check if the computers can still
26 be used for the intent of this Act and thereafter shall be given to the DepEd
27 for deployment to elementary and secondary public schools nationwide.

28
29 Sec. 6. *Additional Online Educational Materials.* – The DepEd may
30 utilize the National Library of the Philippines to complement the Philippine
31 Online Library's digital repository of textbooks with additional materials that

1 are representative of Filipino culture and literature. DepEd shall also be
2 allowed to add other online materials that it deems necessary for expanding
3 the learning opportunities for students.

4
5 Sec. 7. *Custody over Digitized Copies of Textbooks.* – The DepEd and the
6 National Library of the Philippines shall have joint custody over the digitized
7 copies of the textbooks. The DICT shall likewise ensure the technological
8 management of the digital repository to ensure the integrity of the system.

9
10 Sec. 8. *Appropriations.* – The initial amount of Five Hundred Million
11 Pesos (Php 500,000,000.00) shall be appropriated for the immediate
12 implementation of this Act and shall be jointly managed by the DepEd and
13 the DICT. An annual budget of One Hundred Million Pesos (Php
14 100,000,000.00) shall be included in the annual budget of the DepEd to
15 ensure that the equipment and internet connection of public schools for the
16 purpose of this Act will be maintained.

17
18 Sec. 9. *Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – Within ninety (90) days
19 from the effectivity of this Act, the DepEd, the DICT, and the National Library
20 of the Philippines, in close coordination with the Department of Science and
21 Technology, and other stakeholders shall jointly issue the rules and
22 regulations implementing its provisions. The implementing rules and
23 regulations (IRR) issued pursuant to this section shall take effect thirty (30)
24 days after its publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

25
26 Sec. 10. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision or part of this Act is
27 declared invalid or unconstitutional, the remaining provisions or parts not
28 affected shall remain in force and effect.

29
30 Sec. 11. *Repealing Clause.* – All other laws, executive orders,
31 presidential decrees, administrative orders, rules and regulations, issuances,

1 or parts thereof contrary to or inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are
2 hereby repealed or amended accordingly.

3
4 Sec. 12. *Effectivity.* – Notwithstanding the non-issuance of the IRR, this
5 Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in the Official Gazette
6 or in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,