

Teaching practices in the catch-up Fridays program: an experiential challenge to teachers

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Abstract: This study investigated the practices and challenges faced by teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of Grade 6 learners in the Southeast Butuan District through the Catch-Up Fridays Program. Employing a phenomenological research design, the study addressed three primary research questions: (1) the practices teachers used in the Catch-Up Fridays Program to improve reading comprehension, (2) the challenges encountered in this process, and (3) the development of an intervention plan to mitigate these challenges. The participants were six teachers from different elementary schools. The data was collected using an interview guide focusing on best practices and challenges faced by teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension skills. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Key findings revealed that teachers employ various teaching techniques and digital instructional materials to enhance reading comprehension. Student related challenges included absenteeism, varying levels of reading proficiency, and socioeconomic status. Teaching related challenge included time management and stakeholder involvement. An intervention plan was proposed containing key areas such as absenteeism, monitoring and evaluating reading proficiency, time management, and community involvement. Teachers effectively used innovative methods to improve reading skills but they encountered substantial obstacles that require targeted interventions. The intervention plan aimed to address challenges and enhance the reading comprehension among Grade 6 learners.

Keywords: Reading, Challenges, Catch-up Fridays

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill needed by learners to understand advanced subjects they will face in higher grade levels. It is not only useful in school context but also outside of the school environment. Reading comprehension is a must for learners to be ready for employment, live independently, and not become a burden to an already struggling economy. But, the majority of the Grade 6 pupils in Southeast Butuan District struggle with reading comprehension.

By virtue of the Department of Education Memorandum No. 1 series of 2024, Catch-Up Fridays was introduced by the Department of Education (DepEd) in an effort to improve the reading comprehension of learners. The program's strategic design aims to strengthen social, foundational, and other relevant abilities that are necessary for achieving the objectives of the Philippine basic education curriculum. Catch-Up Fridays' main goal is to help learners improve reading comprehension skills. It is a learning mechanism that intends to actualize the intent of the basic education curriculum. The Catch-Up Fridays program was launched on January 12, 2024, and it focuses on reading, values, peace, and health education every Friday throughout the school year 2023-2024. The DepEd stated that all schools nationwide should implement the National Reading Program through events like Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Read-A-Thon, fora, and invitation of resource persons.

DepEd Memorandum No. 1 series of 2024 states that the first part of every Friday will be devoted to operationalizing the National Reading Program (NRP), and the second part will be devoted to promoting values, health, and peace education. Catch Up Fridays are not graded; the learners' progress will be monitored through the Learners' Reflection Journal, which should document reading experiences, learnings, and appreciation of values, health, and peace education.

This study addressed some problematic issues observed in Grade 6 classrooms across the 16 elementary schools of Southeast District, DepEd Butuan City Division. It has been observed that 70% of the Grade 6 learners in the Southeast district struggle with reading comprehension. Hence, the study investigated the Grade 6 teachers' practices as well as challenges in enhancing the reading comprehension in the Southeast district through the implementation of the Catch-up Fridays Program.

Statement of the problem

This study examined the teachers' practices and challenges as they enhanced the reading comprehension skills of the Grade 6 learners of Southeast Butuan District through the Catch-Up Fridays Program.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the teachers' practices in the Catch-Up Fridays Program of DepEd in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the learners?
2. What are the challenges encountered by the teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of the learners?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what intervention plan may be proposed to address the challenges encountered by the teachers to enhance the reading comprehension skills of the learners?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach that focuses on the direct experience of phenomena, emphasizing subjective consciousness and the way people perceive and interpret the world (Rasid, Djafar & Santoso, 2021). It explored the teachers' practices and challenges in the implementation of the Catch-Up Fridays Program of Southeast Butuan District.

Respondents and locale of the study

The research locale of this study: Southeast District, Division of Butuan City, Department of Education Caraga Region. The Southeast District is composed of 16 elementary schools. The Southeast District is located at the southeast part of the City of Butuan. Since the district is a cluster of 16 schools, the distance from the city center varies from 7 km to more than 20 km. The mode of transportation also varies from riding public utility jeepneys for nearer schools to riding for hire motorcycles for farthest schools.

The participants of this research were six teachers from six different elementary schools in Southeast Butuan District.

Research instrument

An interview guide schedule was employed containing interview questions validated by three (3) experts. These questions dealt with the best practices of the teachers in enhancing the reading skills of the Grade 6 pupils as well as the challenges they encountered when going through the implementation of the Catch-up Fridays.

Data analyses procedure

Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the data that were gathered during the conduct of the study. It involved several key steps, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching, reviewing, defining, and naming the themes and creating the report.

During the familiarizing step, audio data were transcribed and note-taking was done. Coding and categorizing data were sorted out to determine the emerging themes that were analyzed and interpreted. Creating the report was the last step in the thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the best practices of teachers in enhancing reading comprehension skills of the Grade 6 learners

Data presents the thematic analysis of the best practices of Grade 6 teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension of Grade 6 learners. Six participating Grade 6 teachers were identified as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T6. Eight codes were identified: Introducing Key Vocabulary, Step-by-Step Reading, Role Playing and Storytelling, One-on-One Reading, Incorporating Multimedia, Activities, Silent and Loud Reading, and Group Analysis and Peer Reading.

Teachers T1, T4, and T6 emphasized introducing key vocabulary words before reading. Teachers T1, T4, and T6 highlighted the use of Step-by-Step Reading, a methodical approach to reading. Role-playing and storytelling are interactive techniques used by teachers T1, T4, T6, and T3 to engage students. One-on-one reading and personalized reading sessions were noted by teachers T1 and T3. Teachers T1 and T3 incorporated digital tools and multimedia to enhance learning. Teachers T2, T3, and T5 used engaging activities like spelling bees, scrambled letters, and puzzles. Both silent and loud reading practices were implemented by teacher T5. Collaborative reading strategies such as Group Analysis and Peer Reading were employed by teachers T5 and T6.

The eight identified codes were grouped into five categories: Unlocking Difficulties, Interactive Reading Activities, Collaboration, Gamification, and ICT Application. Teachers used unlocking difficulties techniques to help students overcome reading challenges. Interactive Reading Activities were applied to make reading more engaging. Data emphasized collaborative learning. Teachers used game-like elements to make learning fun. Integration of Information and Communication Technology in teaching is evident.

The result indicates that two (2) emerging themes are found in determining the best practices of the participants in implementing the Catch-up Fridays program, namely: (1) teaching techniques and (2) the digitalized instructional materials. Teachers used various teaching techniques to improve reading comprehension. The study of Alghamdy (2024) titled: "English Teachers' Practice of Classroom Discourse in Light of Zone of Proximal Development Theory and Scaffolding Techniques" showed that teachers' techniques in the classroom assisted students in obtaining learning potential. The study of Aini (2024) titled: "The Implementation of Scaffolding Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension" showed that teachers using varied

teaching techniques are able to motivate students to achieve better reading skills. Teachers also used digital tools and resources to support teaching. The study of Sari and Yulisetiani (2024) titled: "Effectiveness of Interactive Digital Crossword Media for Reading Skills Comprehension of Historical Stories" showed the usefulness of digital instructional materials in arousing interest in reading. The study of Yan and Kim (2023) titled: "The effects of schema strategy training using digital mind mapping on reading comprehension: A case study of Chinese university students in EFL context" showed that digital teaching tools are able to engage students with the interactive process and tap students' background knowledge.

The teachers employ various strategies to enhance reading comprehension among Grade 6 learners. This includes introducing key vocabulary, step-by-step reading, role-playing, storytelling, one-on-one reading, and multimedia. Teachers also applied engaging activities such as spelling bees and puzzles and collaborative methods such as group analysis and peer reading. Using digital tools and gamification techniques further supports interactive and engaging learning experiences.

These are supported by the following excerpts that point out the teaching techniques:

In terms of digitalized instructional materials, teachers apply the integration of computer technology and the use of multimedia as supported by the following excerpt:

Digitalized instructional materials (DIMs) are instructional materials that are delivered through digital media. Often, the use of videos and online supplementary resources is emphasized to be more engaging with our Gen Z learners, the Grade 6 pupils. Incorporating learners' interests and choice of text to be read are some insights to be considered, and the practice of a rewards system could be a motivation to enhance reading comprehension skills.

Challenges encountered by teachers in enhancing reading comprehension skills

As can be gleaned from the data, there are six emerging themes considered by the participants as challenges, namely: (1) absenteeism, (2) the diverse levels of reading proficiency of the learners, (3) time constraints, (4) lack of learner materials, and (5) lacking parental involvement.

The attendance of learners is always a challenge to teachers. This goes true with the catch-up Friday sessions that indicate several reasons for absenteeism.

On the other hand, the different levels of reading proficiency skills imply individual differences. These individual differences in reading proficiency levels required much teaching effort, time, and resources which were very limited to wit:

Another challenge for teachers to enhance reading comprehension skills is the involvement of the stakeholders in the community. Parents and other knowledgeable people in the community would be of help in motivating the learners. The commitment they give to assist this program would be of great help to the teachers who do not have much time to conduct this program alone. This needs collaboration and cooperation since other school activities and community celebrations tend to disrupt the time allocated for Catch-up Fridays.

Data presents 11 identified codes: Frequently Absent Pupils, varying Levels of Reading Proficiency, Disruptive with Other Activities, Lack of Interest in Reading, Poverty, Family Environment, Limited Resources, Diverse Learning Needs, Language Barrier, Lack of Parental Involvement, and Lack of Interest and Commitment.

Frequently absent pupils challenged teachers as they missed out on critical reading interventions and activities. Pupils' varying levels of reading proficiency mean teachers have to vary reading interventions and activities, which is usually not feasible. Planned reading

interventions and activities are frequently disrupted by other activities, leading to students needing to be more focused on non-reading activities. Lack of interest in reading is a worrying attitude of pupils. The challenge of poverty affects much of students' learning. Family environment situations are impacting students' reading development. Limited Resources resulted in insufficient materials and tools for teaching. Diverse Learning Needs among students challenged the teachers. Language Barriers resulted in learning language difficulty. Lack of Parental Involvement in their children's reading activities negatively impacted the pupils' reading progress. Lack of interest and commitment among students to reading also challenges the teachers.

The 11 identified codes were grouped into five categories: attendance, varying levels of reading proficiency, insufficient time allotment, socioeconomic status, and individual differences. Most of the reading comprehension issues arise due to student absenteeism. Diverse reading proficiency levels resulted in difficulties in identifying focused reading interventions and activities. There must be more time for allotment for reading activities, which is a common challenge among teachers. The teachers noted that the socioeconomic status of the pupils influences reading comprehension skills. Individual differences among pupils give teachers a hard time in crafting suitable differentiated activities.

The data analysis produced six overarching themes, namely, low reading proficiency skills, time constrain, low stakeholders' involvement, and lack of learners' motivation. The challenges met by teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension skills of Grade 6 pupils were as follows: The impact of frequent absences on learning; Addressing the wide range of reading abilities; Challenges in allocating sufficient time for reading; Influence of family environment and socioeconomic status; The role of parents and other stakeholders in supporting reading; and Individual student interests and commitment levels. In summary, pressing challenges included frequent absenteeism.

Varied levels of reading proficiency and a lack of interest in reading were concerning. Showed that the varied levels of reading proficiency among students put a great challenge to teachers. Reading Attitude and Learning Motivation as Predictors of Reading Comprehension showed that students' lack of interest in reading negatively affects reading comprehension and predicts low reading performance.

Pupils' socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and family environment, also play a significant role. Reading Dimensions and Reading Profile of Grade Two Learners showed that students with lower socioeconomic status pull their reading skills backward. Additionally, limited resources, diverse learning needs, language barriers, and insufficient parental involvement complicate the teaching process: Exploring challenges and factors in students' literacy: basis for intervention program development showed that schools limited resources, varied students' learning needs, language barriers, and insufficient parental involvement resulted in the Philippines very low ranking among 79 countries in reading comprehension. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, improving attendance, tailoring reading activities to different proficiency levels, and increasing stakeholder engagement.

Intervention plan to address the challenges encountered by the teachers in enhancing the reading comprehension skills on Catch-Up Fridays program (CFP)

Data presents the intervention plan aimed at addressing challenges faced by teachers in enhancing reading comprehension skills through the Catch-up Fridays Program (CFP). Based on

the results of the study, the following key areas covered: Absenteeism, Reading Proficiency Skills (Monitoring and Evaluation), Time Management, and Community Involvement.

The first key result area is absenteeism, and the objective is to address absenteeism during Catch-up Fridays. The persons involved are teachers, school officials, and community stakeholders. The methodology to achieve the objective includes the following: SWOT analysis of the community where CFP is implemented; Initiating livelihood projects to supplement family income; Personality enrichment seminars; Seminar workshops on responsible parenthood; and Reward system.

SWOT analysis of the community where CFP is implemented will be done during summer break. Initiating livelihood projects to supplement family income will be done all year round. Personality enrichment seminars will be done during quarterly school activities. Seminar workshops on responsible parenthood will be done bi-monthly.

The study showed that SWOT analysis is critical to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of intervention programs. It stressed that livelihood projects should supplement family income as the family's livelihood highly correlates to higher literacy levels among students. The study showed that helping students improve their overall personality will also increase their reading skills. Finally, Parental Engagement and Nurturance on the Reading Performance of Intermediate Pupils showed that parent's engagement with the school and their parenting develop their children's love towards reading.

The second key result area is Reading Proficiency Skills (Monitoring and Evaluation), and the objective is to conduct periodic monitoring and assessment of learners' reading comprehension skills. The persons involved are advisers and volunteers. To achieve this purpose, the methodologies to be used are conducting oral reading and tutorial sessions. Oral reading will be done monthly. The improving oral and written narration and reading comprehension of children at-risk for language and literacy difficulties: Results of a randomized clinical trial showed that oral reading is a highly effective teaching technique for students with difficulty reading.

The third key result area is Time Management, and the objective is to allocate special time slots for slow readers. The persons involved are advisers, students, and teachers. The methodology will be peer/pair share and will be done on a monthly schedule. The study showed that effective teachers' time management strategies ensure that reading remediation is done correctly.

The fourth key result area is Community Involvement, which aims to establish partnerships with community stakeholders. The persons involved are advisers and DepEd regional representatives. The methodology is establishing a reading center exclusive for struggling readers with a schedule every Saturday. The Leadership Empowering Behavior and Reading Comprehension Strategies for Non-Readers in Cluster 13, Davao City Division" showed the importance of improving public relations skills to solicit support for the establishment of literacy centers in schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn based on the findings of this study:

1. The teachers effectively practiced the use technology and innovative teaching techniques to enhance students' reading comprehension.

2. Major challenges in improving reading comprehension are complex and included absenteeism, diverse learners' proficiency levels, and limited family and stakeholders involvement.

3. The intervention plan to help teachers enhance students' reading comprehension abilities during the Catch-up Fridays Program targets key areas such as absenteeism, monitoring and evaluating reading proficiency skills, time management, and community involvement. This intervention plan is designed to create a comprehensive support system to teachers aiming to address various factors affecting pupils' reading comprehension skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are forwarded to the following education program policy makers:

1. DepEd officials could provide training and professional development opportunities focused on diverse teaching techniques and digitalized instructional materials to help teachers stay updated with the latest educational strategies and technologies towards improved reading comprehension skills. The intervention plan proposed in this study may be used as guide inform the training design of such professional development opportunities.

2. DepEd officials may establish support systems that address the challenges faced by teachers. Support systems include mentorship, peer collaboration, and additional resources for time management.

3. DepEd officials could allocate specific time for teachers to plan and manage their activities in enhancing students' reading comprehension skills. Such plans may be adopted and incorporated in the Catch Up Fridays Program thereby enhancing its sustainability and institutionalization.

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