

## Exploring Teacher's Effective Strategies in Catch-Up Fridays in Addressing Reading Gap

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### ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic made a lot troubles in the educational field particularly in the area of reading proficiency. In response to this problem, the Department of Education in the Philippines implemented the Catch-up Fridays initiative which is dedicated to intensive remediation on selected areas. In this study, reading remediation is the focus. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of various teacher strategies used in the sessions. Using a descriptive qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 purposively sampled teachers. The findings highlight the use of Philippine Informal Reading Inventory as key assessment tool and preference for strategies such as peer tutoring, and content-based instruction. However, challenges such as time constraints, insufficient resources, and lack of structured curriculum were identified. Despite the challenges posed by the situation, teachers demonstrated commitment on the program and in enhancing student outcomes. The study concludes that while Catchup Fridays show potential in addressing reading problems, its success hinges on adequate support such as resources and improved guidelines. The findings underscore the need for continuous improvement and support to optimize the program's impact on reading proficiency.

### KEYWORDS

Catchup Fridays; reading proficiency; reading remediation; Phil-IRI

## INTRODUCTION

The unexpected disruptions caused by the Pandemic have greatly disturbed the educational system in the Philippines. Significant learning losses were accounted, and it has also widened the pre-existing achievement gaps (ABConservation, 2022; Tria, 2020). Given the circumstances, reading proficiency stands as a fundamental skill which is identified to be important for learners. Deficits in the ability to be competency in reading will hinder academic success and overall well-being. Recognizing this urgent need to address these problems, the Philippines' Department of Education (DepED) implemented the Catch-Up Fridays initiative. This program dedicates Fridays to intensive efforts for remediation. The targets are acceleration of reading development among students who have fallen short of the standard reading skills. Aligned with the MATATAG Education Agenda, the Department of Education (DepEd) is set to implement Catch-Up Fridays under the National Reading and Mathematics Programs, specifically the Pagbasa at Pagkuwenta: Pag-asa (P3), as critical subprograms of the National Learning Recovery Program stipulated in DepEd Order No. 013, s. 2023 (DM-CT-2024-007).

Catchup Fridays reflects the approach which can be considered as proactive to help minimize the effect of the pandemic related learning loss. In this area, however, there is a

limited amount of information regarding the appraisal of the strategies used in teaching reading. Though, there is a broad education research supporting the value of targeted reading interventions, differentiated instruction and engaging activities, understanding the overall effectiveness and strategies employed by teachers is crucial for enhancement of the current program. The time slot dedicated for remediation could uniquely impact student outcomes (Bernal Jr, et al, 2023).

The initiative includes a structured matrix of activities and intervention plans that provides the aim of enhancing learner's reading proficiency and overall academic performance. Each Friday is divided into sessions focusing on the National Reading Program with emphasis on different themes for example: values, health, peace education. (DEPED Memo No. 001 Series 2024)

This research investigated the effectiveness of teacher strategies used for reading remediation during Catch-Up Fridays. This will also look at the views coming from teachers and students by delving into the practices employed in one of the public schools in Iligan City Division located at Lanao del Norte. Specifically, these are the following research questions to be answered:

1. What specific strategies for reading interventions were used by teachers on Catch-up Fridays?
2. How do teachers differentiate the instruction across various student reading levels?
3. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Catch-Up Fridays in addressing the gaps in reading?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Needs of Struggling Readers***

In 2018, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that the Philippines ranked the lowest among the 79 countries participating in the assessment. Struggles on the comprehension level are one area of concern. They documented that no item was considered easy for the students in their item analysis. Furthermore, inferential and evaluative comprehensions were considered the most difficult ones for them. In another study, researchers have also pinpointed that students are low in these areas: (1) discerning various patterns of text (comparison and contrast, definition, description, narration, etc.) in texts, (2) assessing coherence, organization, grammar, and mechanics of text, (3) poor vocabulary knowledge, (4) identifying ways on how to select and organize information (Urbano et al., 2021).

In addition, students at mastery levels in reading in higher levels in Senior High School also experience problems with low scores. In a reading comprehension proficiency assessment conducted in Calamba City, 7% of the 115 respondents were on the mastery level reading, followed by 49% on the near mastery level and 44% on the poor mastery level (Caraig & Quimbo, 2022).

To combat these problems in the status quo, an interactive and holistic approach should be used. Various interactive techniques and interdisciplinary collaborations could help foster students' learning experiences in comprehension skills. Due to the multi-roles played by the teachers in the field, it is indeed necessary to have a roster assigned to meet the challenges of low reading performance. The literature review of Gatcho and Bautista, (2019), revealed that teachers performed various roles in schools and that the cultivation of the roles and duties of remedial reading relies on many factors. Focus and resource allocation should be done to help minimize the effects of poor reading achievement among learners.

The documented struggles of reading have always existed in the Philippine context. A needs assessment on the national scale should be conducted to craft a suitable intervention plan for this problem.

### ***Nature of Good Reading Interventions***

Given the nature of Catch-Up Fridays, the goal is to improve literacy and numeracy. The DepEd initiative wants to fill the learning gaps that come with the effects of the past pandemic. Most reading intervention programs are pre-planned with activities and learning targets based on the nature of preparation (Klang et al., 2022; Wanzek et al., 2020). Careful planning based on data from diagnostic tests was done before initiatives were actualized.

Effective interventions start with the proper diagnosis of participants. They must look at their current skill set to identify the proper treatment for the deficiencies. However, most schools go into general screenings for reading, having more assessments than needed, but this does not improve the accuracy of decisions (VanMeveren et al., 2018). It is important to note that standardized tests should be employed to assess the student's ability properly. Teachers can apply a dual discrepancy model to identify students at risk of student difficulty. Valladolid (2014) established the DD model's construct validity, relevance, and utility, which has some evidence of applicability in the Philippine Public Schools. A standardized model and a reliable instrument will help identify the students needing this service.

Looking at the relevant studies on what makes a good reading intervention, Sophia and Nilsson (2021) used targeted instruction with strong relationships to foster better student outcomes. Building trust and confidence empowers students to realize their capacity for learning and take responsibility for it. Moreover, another criterion should also be considered the presence of an interactive and supportive environment in the interventions. This was proven effective in encouraging students to share compliments and constructive feedback among themselves (Foorman et al., 2009; Neumann et al., 2008).

Understanding individual differences is essential when choosing the right intervention plan. These considerations will help students meet their reading needs.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### ***Research Design***

The research used a descriptive qualitative research approach. The method comprehensively describe the narrated experiences and phenomena that can be described by the study participants (Cahilog et al., 2023). In the study's context, the descriptive qualitative design is the best method to explore in detail the interventions done by teachers and the differentiation of instruction across various student reading levels. Moreover, it was also identify the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program in addressing the gaps in reading.

### ***Research Locale***

The context of the public schools in Iligan City Division due to the area of concern from the researcher. The documented experiences and teaching strategies of the teachers in this school helped in the provision of rich and relevant insights into the overarching theme of the research.

### ***Research Participants***

The participants were chosen based on purposive sampling. The inclusion criterion was a teacher affiliated in one of the public schools of Iligan City Division-DepED and Catch-up Friday Implementers. A total of 13 participants were included in the study.

### **Research Gathering**

In the data gathering procedure, the researchers used of a semi-structured questionnaire in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the reading interventions used by the educators. The said semi- structured questionnaire was validated by some experts. A recording of the interview was done, and a detailed transcription was also done in order to identify the themes of the study.

### **Ethical Standards**

Ethical standards to be considered were the introduction of the objectives of the study with an embedded consent from the part of participants before recording. There was an emphasis on anonymity to protect the teachers in the study. Data was restored securely and was only accessible to the researchers. The participation was voluntary, with the freedom to withdraw anytime. Moreover, the presentation of findings was maintained strictly transparent, only highlighting the participants' views and opinions without any forms of bias or altercations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***What specific strategies for reading interventions were used by teachers on Catch-up Fridays?***

The findings revealed that several key insights which are: Synchronize Used of Assessment Tool for Students Reading Level and Strategies Used by Teachers in the Reading Activities. These are elaborated below:

#### ***Synchronize Used of Assessment Tool for Students Reading Level***

Developing reading interventions are rooted in meticulous assessment of student's reading level. In the context of this study, the teachers were using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory Assessment tool to measure and describe the student's reading performance. As seen in these lines:

*"I have remarks there. I also use PHIL-IRI in my reading assessment in a quarterly basis. So in our Catch-up Friday, it is my regular assessment tool.", (P8).*

*"By applying the Phil-IRI reading progress chart with indicators such as non-readers, frustration, instructional and so on and so forth.", (P4).*

The usage of PHIL-IRI is commonly used in the Philippines in order to look at the reading efficiency of students because of DEPED's mandate (Abocejo et al., 2022; Buenaventura, 2019; Villalva, 2023). In the school's context, the teachers are very much aware of how useful the tool is, in fact according to some teachers, there was a need to pay attention to students who were under the expected level of proficiency. As expressed in these lines:

*"Catch-up Friday are different from usual reading class because in catch-up Friday reading is the focus. Like activities related to reading, integration of values, health and peace education. There is indeed a need to help slow learners to be proficient.", (P3).*

Indeed, a good tool for reading skills assessment, helps the teachers know what the problems that the students experience. Given the comprehensive nature of the tool, most teachers indeed see the benefits of using it for the Catchup Fridays Program of DEPED.

#### ***Strategies Used by Teachers in the Reading Activities***

Teaching of reading to students with different reading proficiency level will not be easy for certain teachers. Given the context of this study, the teachers are using different strategies to facilitate learning as shown in the table below.

**Table 1.** Strategies Used by Teachers in the Reading Activities

Strategies	Frequency	Sample Textual Evidence
Peer Tutoring	7	<i>“My strategies were just merely same sa one-on-one reading, individual reading, peer to peer, group, silent and oral reading. So I think There is no difference when it comes to strategies from the usual day.”- (P1).</i>
Content Based Instruction	6	<i>“ I integrate topics from other subjects as contents in my reading assignments ”- (P11).</i>
Drop Everything and Read	5	<i>... But it is actually differs from the actual class hours. Every friday, I will let them drop everything and I used ‘DEAR’ program or Drop Everything And Read. - (P7).</i>
One-On-One Reading,	2	<i>Usually, sir, we have one-on-one reading. Okay. So yan, we call it single reading...- (P9).</i>
Reflective Journal	2	<i>I ask them to read and have a reflection written in their notebooks. - (P7).</i>
Silent Reading.	1	<i>..... Reading silently is one of the strategies I used, especially if the passages are lengthy- (P8).</i>
Synonyms-Antonyms Drill	1	<i>....we do the synonyms-antonyms drill before reading or before the process the actual reading and during the material reading, we give synonyms-antonyms drill. - (P1).</i>
Think And Pair Share	1	<i>TPR... this is good for analyzing and sharing ideas after reading. - (P4).</i>

Among all the strategies used Peer tutoring is the most preferred by most teachers. This indicates the there is a strong emphasis on collaborative learning where students can work together to learn from each other. This is followed by content-based instruction with a frequency of 6, highlighting the integration of other subject matter with language instruction.

The least used strategies are silent reading, synonyms-antonyms drill, and think and pair share which are all tied in the frequency of 1. Overall the data indicated preference for interactive and integrated teaching methods with collaborative learning component.

These are the strategies used by the teachers and its corresponding definition and features:

Peer tutoring involves putting together students in a group in order to learn and understand selected course materials. The method makes use of leveraging knowledge and skills of student achievers to support peers who may need additional help by providing collaborative learning environments (Duran et al., 2020).

Content Based Instruction (CBI) is an approach that makes use integrating content and language learning objectives. CBI used the medium to teach subjects in helping students develop their language skills in the context of academic content learning (Er, 2023).

Drop Everything and Read is a literacy practice where teachers make the students break from regular activities and emphasize spending time reading books of their choice. The goal is to foster love for reading and improve literacy skills dedicated for reading time on a regular school day (Reading Rocket, n.d.)

One-on-one reading involves reading sessions between student and teacher. The approach provides a customization of personalized instruction based on needs (Markovitz et al., 2022).

Reflective journal is a personal record of someone’s thoughts, ideas, reflections, and learning experiences. This helps in self-assessment, critical thinking, and deepening understanding (Holland, 2024).

Silent reading is a practices that students read texts silently to themselves. The method aims to enhance reading comprehension, fluency, and enjoyment of reading by letting students engage with the texts at their own pace without distractions (Iris Reading, 2023).

Synonyms-antonyms drill provides exercises where students practice finding words in the opposite and same ideas.

Think-pair-share a strategy where students first think about a question then pairs up to discuss their ideas together. This involves activate participation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning.

Peer tutoring has been considered as an effective strategy in reading intervention programs .Oral reading rate has increased following the implementation of it in some interventions programs done(Dufrene et al., 2010a; Tsuei et al., 2020). Using the peer tutoring strategy, the teachers have felt that it is the most convenient way to help the students since there is an element of diversity. The reading skills of the students vary in terms of level. In the studies of (Dufrene et al., 2010b; Kourea et al., 2007; Van Keer, 2004), all have supported that the positive effects of this strategy in helping students in their comprehension.

The students that have higher reading level was able to see fulfillment in helping and for the one with lower levels have seen the positive side of a peer-to-peer engagement. As to the results of this study, teachers have seen the potential of using this to help solve the problems on the lack of manpower. Furthermore, the effectiveness of this strategy in a large class scale is evident as shown in other study which demonstrated improved performance (Veerkamp et al., 2007).

### ***How do teachers differentiate the instruction across various student reading levels?***

There are different challenges in differentiating instruction faced by the teachers due to time constraints, and the variety of student reading levels. These challenges were elaborate on the the theme identified.

#### ***Struggles in differentiation of Instruction***

The teachers have identified the different levels of reading proficiency among students in one of the public schools in Iligan City Division. Given the little time that they have in their preparation, most of them resorted to dividing the class into groups. Accordingly, their activities will vary across all identified levels of proficiency as mentioned in these selected transcripts:

*“I group my students based on the reading level. One group for the slow readers and one group for the independent readers.”, (P11).*

*“...different strategies that I use on small groups into different levels. Stories will be based on their respective levels”, (P8).*

Given the number of students, teachers find the extra responsibility tiring and draining since there are a lot of students who needs extra help because of problems in their reading proficiency. It is also important to note that teachers have already a lot of things in their plate. Looking for the right resources and planning instruction is quite to difficult for them because of time constraints and other responsibilities. As one teacher said that:

*“For the teachers, we already have a lot of things to do. Catchup Fridays do have a lot of requirements and preparation. Though, the intention is good, the burden is still passed on the teacher”, (P2).*

There is indeed a need to carefully set support systems for teachers assigned with catch-up Fridays. Preparation of materials and other activities are essential to make the program very effective. Moreover, the teachers said the following statements:

*“ We do not have a stardized reading tool for our learners. ”, (P3).*

*“I need to come out with the different activities every week and its really hard to formulate and construct. ”, (P4).*

The struggles of teachers in conceptualizing activities and looking for the right resources will require a lot of effort and time. Indeed it impact the results of a certain program like catchup Fridays. It is essential to look on this area in order to lessen the burden of the teachers facilitating the program.

Effective reading programs require manpower and adequate resources. This will help cultivate an environment for conducive learning. The elements of an effective reading intervention program as prescribed by the American Federation of Teachers is composed of the following: strong reading curriculum, instructional materials, and appropriate reading assessment tools (American Federation of Teachers, n.d.). Realistically the setting of this study did not have the prescribed elements. In fact teachers believer that there should be a need to have the following: appropriate materials, lesson plans and matrix as seen in the transcripts below:

*“I think maybe before the school year, there should be intended plan and activities. Reading materials every Friday for Filipino or English should be provided so that we are prepared to handle ng Catch-up Friday.” (P1).*

*“There should be a curriculum guide for the reading intervention program from Central Office. It should be plotted and arrange per quarter to accommodate student progress. ”, (P2).*

Overall the dedicated of teachers are still there despite the challenges faced. It is important to help them in order for this program to successfully fulfill its goals for the development of the reading skills of the students. Differentiated instruction is considered to be effective in most reading intervention programs. In the study of Magableh and Abdullah, (2021), they have seen that differentiated instruction was effective in increasing the reading comprehension achievement of students. In their experimental design, the group with the treatment has outperformed the counterparts of the control group. However, other studies have also concluded that differentiated instruction is much beneficial for lower reading levels over higher levels (Karst et al., 2022). This must be accounted as well since the readers of this study are not homogeneous in their reading levels.

### ***What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of Catch-Up Fridays in addressing the gaps in reading?***

Teachers acknowledge the potential of the Catch-up Fridays initiative in improving the reading skills and several key areas of improvements which are elaborated carefully on the following themes identified.

#### ***Teachers’ Positive View on Catchup Fridays***

Teachers are convinced that the initiative will help in addressing the problems brought by the pandemic. A great number of support can be seen in from the teachers saying that it helps in improving some difficulties in language and reading problems as stipulated in these transcripts:

*“Greatest strength is:, I think more building on vocabulary and meanings.”, (P1).*

*“And then proper pronunciation of words especially sa English can be catered.” (P5)*

*“And then the progress of their learners depending on what pace of reading”, (P6)*

*“It is important in enhancing the reading skills of the students.”, (P8).*

Teachers have seen the potential of the program if it is improved in certain areas. Much of the positivity is grounded on their commitment to participate in national building and care for their students. In fact, some teachers wanted to have trainings on how to facilitate this better.

*“I hope and suggest that next school year there will be a lot of training. More, more training and seminars for teachers like us regarding this Catch-Up Fridays.”, (P5)*

Given the commitment of teachers and their positive attitude towards the catchup Fridays. It is imperative the there is a need to improve the system and its implementation guidelines.

### ***Upcoming Struggles and Weaknesses of the Program***

The program is still new and its guidelines are not that extensive as of the moment. Problems have arisen in its implementation this year. One of the most noted problems that teachers faced right now is the increased number of student absenteeism in the program.

*“During Fridays, students will not enter the class. Even if I constantly call them why they are absent, they won’t mind and would still choose not to go during Friday.”, (P2).*

*“They were eager and their participative back then. But during the third day or third Friday, students started to get bored. They were no longer interested, some of them were absent. I would say that others are physically present but they are mentally absent, their minds are wandering.”, (P3).*

*“Yet as days went by, the attendance for the Catch-Up Fridays is slowly deteriorating.”, (P9).*

In the current implementation one of the public schools in Iligan City Division, the teachers are dedicated enough to see the program succeed in its goals. However, the lack of curriculum value has led to student disinterest in the program. There were no grades that will held them accountable for the program. Teachers suggests that it should be graded in order to enforce accountability.

*“...for me the area that needs to be improved is, a good grading system. Students just go to school and the teachers could not make them accountable.”, (P2)*

Given the suggestion, there was an observation from the teacher’s part that students are not motivated especially those who do not have problems they are still required to enter. Given this state, it is important to note that the program should cater to different groups of learners. Most of excellent students are peer tutors and some have complains because they are burdened with the situation.

An improved guidelines and provision of necessary materials will hopefully minimize these problems. As supported in the study of Tursunovich (2022), educational manuals and materials should be the result of productive and systematic work, which requires time and a pool of specialists. Given the present condition of catch-up Fridays, it is evident that materials for all levels and conditions should be carefully planned and created by the

Department of Education to minimize the stress among teachers and will help the students with their condition.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of Catch-up Fridays by the Department of Education in the Philippines represents a proactive approach in mitigating the learning losses in reading proficiency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This study investigated the effectiveness of teacher strategies used in this initiative. The findings revealed that several key insights which are: Teachers effectively used the PHIL-IRI as an assessment tool for student reading levels. A variety of instructional strategies used were peer tutoring and content-based instruction as the most preferred. These strategies fostered a collaborative and integrative learning environment which is beneficial for high student engagement and enhancement of reading skills. Teachers faced challenges in differentiating instruction due to time constraints, and the variety of student reading levels. Grouping based on the levels of proficient was the common practice. Teachers acknowledge the potential of the Catch-up Fridays initiative in improving the reading skills and several key areas of improvement which are : controlling students frequent absence during the scheduled dates, lack of accountability due to absence of grading system, and more comprehensive guidelines with curriculum guide was necessary. Catch-up Fridays should be improved in order to achieve more in its goals for student development.

Given the findings of the study, the Department of Education program supervisors in each region could provide adequate resources for reading and further trainings for its teachers in the implementation of Catch-up Fridays. Additionally, structured guidelines on the assessment of student progress should be created because it was evident that most students escape from classes and the idea of accountability could never be enforced since it's not graded. Implementing accountability measures ensure that both students and teachers are responsible for their roles in the program. Future researchers should conduct further studies that directly measures the actual reading progress of students before and after the Catch-up Fridays.

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