

## Unravelling Catch-Up Fridays: A Look through Novice Teachers' Perspectives



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**ABSTRACT:** Given the critical role of reading proficiency in learner success, the Department of Education's (DepEd) Catch-Up Fridays program holds promise for improving literacy skills. Prioritizing this program at the school level is essential. However, a potential challenge lies in ensuring the preparedness of novice teachers, those new to the profession, to implement such initiatives effectively.

This study aimed to understand the experiences of novice teachers in the first month of implementation of Catch-Up Fridays in the 1st District of Ilocos Sur. The participants of the study were five (5) teachers. They were selected based on the inclusion criteria: 1) 0-3 years in the service, 2) a DepEd employee, 3) a resident of Unit II (Bantay, Caoayan, Santa, San Vicente, Sta. Catalina, Sto. Domingo, and San Ildefonso), and 4) must be willing to participate in the study. This study utilized phenomenological research, applying the focus group discussion and semi-structured open-ended questions. Data collection involved verbatim transcription of participant responses. These transcripts were then systematically analyzed using the Moustakas framework. This analysis included listing, categorization, coding, and thematic identification.

The findings indicated that novice teachers viewed their experiences of the first month of Catch-Up Fridays as a Symphony of Emotions-Frustrations to Aspirations with two sub-themes emerging, namely having mixed emotions and being optimistic in enhancing literacy skills. All the novice teacher participants went through a stressful, struggling, and confused phase caused by inadequate resources and lack of training. Amidst the challenges they faced during the first month of implementation of Catch-Up Fridays, they were optimistic for a better outcome because there was an improvement in learners' literacy.

Even though novice teachers typically display commendable optimism amid hard times, focused assistance can boost the effective execution of the program. To enhance the effectiveness of school-level Catch-up Fridays, administrators could provide these educators with comprehensive orientation sessions or seminar workshops. However, making available teaching aids will help to reduce anticipated stress, thereby guaranteeing smooth program implementation.

**KEYWORDS:** Catch-Up Fridays, Novice Teachers, Reading, Moustakas Framework, Phenomenology

### INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation of individual and societal progress, with reading proficiency holding a crucial position in influencing learners' academic achievements and opportunities. The importance of nurturing strong reading abilities in learners has prompted educators and policymakers to introduce various reading initiatives within educational institutions. The creation and execution of a School-Based Reading Program should not be viewed as a universal solution or a quick fix but rather as a comprehensive approach aimed at addressing literacy challenges across the school community. In this context, a reading program denotes a standardized method of delivering reading education throughout the school.

Literacy is not just a concern at the national level but rather a global one. The state is committed to prioritizing and implementing initiatives to eliminate illiteracy. The introduction of this legislation stands as a powerful mechanism to eradicate the alarming rise in illiteracy rates. This scenario could potentially occur by effectively addressing reading literacy (Tomas, M. J. L., Villaros, E. T., & Galman, S. M. A., 2021).

According to the Department of Education (DepEd), as cited by Servallos (2023), the Philippines' poor performance in PISA 2022 shows students lag in learning by 5-6 years. PISA 2022 mean scores: math-472, reading-476, science-485. The Philippines

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scored 120 points below average: math-355, reading-347, science-373. Every 20 points below average equals one year behind in learning pace for 15-year-olds in PISA countries, per OECD. Philippines improved by 2.2% in math, 6.9% in reading, and decreased by 0.8% in science proficiency from 2018 to 2022.

Moreover, the substantial proportion of students who failed to meet the expected reading standards is evident in the Phil-IRI assessments. Consequently, enhancing children's reading proficiency has consistently been a focal point of national and local endeavors. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the global health crisis, the DepEd has launched and financed numerous initiatives and schemes tailored to the requirements of diverse learners in the 21st century, highlighting the importance of cultivating a passion for reading among them. Thus, the DepEd promotes and mandates all educators to assume the role of reading instructors. Recognizing the critical significance of literacy instruction in developing the abilities and aptitudes of learners is essential.

November is National Reading Month annually, and various activities lead to "Araw ng Pagbasa Day" on the first Monday. The DepEd and the World Vision Development Foundation (WVDF) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Brigada Pagbasa Program in 2019. This program supports DepEd's goal of providing quality education and a partnership initiative in response to Hamon: Bawat Bata Bumabasa. The launch occurred on September 18, 2019, at Top Shelf in Fully Booked, Taguig City (Archive, 2023).

On the other hand, the Schools Division of Ilocos Sur implements national and regional reading programs. They use the Revised Philippine Informal Reading Inventory for pretest and posttest. The division also utilizes the Functional Literacy Assessment Tool or FLAT (2020) to measure children's reading levels. Education supervisors validate reading assessments in schools. During the pandemic, the division introduced reading programs like (Wikang Iloko at Filipino Isulong), Knowledge Corner: Instrumental in the New Normal Education, Family Reading Nook Project: A Home for Structured Reading Activity and Adopt-a-Struggling-Reader.

In line with DepEd Memorandum No. 001, s. 2024, the Department of Education (DepEd) calls upon all regions, divisions, and schools to actively participate in the implementation of 'Catch-Up Fridays.' This initiative is designed to address learning gaps identified in national and international assessments, particularly those related to low reading proficiency. The program aims to improve learners' academic performance by strengthening reading skills across the board.

To achieve this objective, DepEd will be implementing 'Catch-Up Fridays' nationwide in all elementary and secondary schools, as well as community learning centers (CLCs), beginning January 12, 2024. Every Friday in January will be dedicated to the 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) activity and orientation sessions for field officials (Razon, n.d.).

From the above trends and issues, the researchers looked into the gap that the scholars had not investigated and found that Catch-Up Fridays is one of the literacy initiatives and is considered a new phenomenon in the Department of Education. Moreover, most of the studies gathered by the researchers focus on using descriptive correlational and mixed methods, which cannot answer the experiences of novice teachers regarding challenges and coping mechanisms on the implementation of such reading initiatives. This study aims to understand the implementation of Catch-Up Fridays based on novice teachers' unique experiences, a new phenomenon that occurred in the Department of Education. Also, it identifies the views, feelings, and thoughts of novice teachers during the first-month implementation of every Catch-Up Friday in their schools. The findings of this investigation would enrich the existing body of knowledge concerning literacy initiatives, specifically within the context of the Schools Division of Ilocos Sur.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed the phenomenological approach. As Moustakas (1994) pointed out, the research procedure begins with identifying the phenomenon of interest. After collecting data through phenomenological interviews with collaborators who experienced the phenomenon, the data were analyzed according to Moustakas' phenomenological data analysis procedure. The study participants were five (5) novice teachers in public schools in the 1st District of Schools Division of Ilocos Sur. The researchers employed the inclusion criteria in selecting them as follows: 1) 0-3 years in the service, 2) a DepEd employee, 3) a resident of Unit II (Bantay, Caoayan, Santa, San Vicente, Sta. Catalina, Sto. Domingo, and San Ildefonso), and 4) must be willing to participate in the study. In the initial phase of the study, the researchers generated preliminary sketches (Robotfoto) of the samples to be used. The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide (Aide Memoire) developed by the researchers following established interview guide development procedures. Before commencing the interviews, an information package containing participant informed consent was sent to all participants. The focus group discussion was conducted in a hybrid manner for 20-30 minutes through an MS Teams video conference and audio recording.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. Responses originally provided in Filipino and Ilokano were translated into English for analysis. Following the initial identification of significant statements, a thematic analysis was conducted. This involved clustering statements representing common or typical participants' experiences. These clusters then underwent

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further analysis to identify overarching themes. By examining similarities and relationships among the clusters, the analysis aimed to extract a core theme that comprehensively describes the participants' shared views and experiences.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Theme: Symphony of Emotions - Frustrations to Aspirations

This study explores and understands the views, feelings, and thoughts experienced by teachers, especially those employed with 0-3 years in service. Novice teachers view their experiences on the first month of implementation of Catch-Up Fridays through various sub-themes, such as having mixed emotions and being optimistic in enhancing literacy skills.

#### Sub-theme 1: Having Mixed Emotions

Various emotional reactions may arise from implementing Catch-Up Fridays in the workplace or educational environments. Some view this as a welcome opportunity to relieve the stress of constant deadlines, providing a specific time slot for addressing outstanding work and incomplete projects. On the other hand, others may have emotional outbursts due to worries about managing their workload, anxiety about falling behind, or the possibility of experiencing more stress if the initiative is seen as an additional demand rather than a release from existing stress. These responses show how difficult it may be to adopt new regulations and how careful planning and compassionate communication are necessary to consider the community's many viewpoints and emotional needs.

Two of the participants agreed that their overall experience with Catch-Up Fridays on its first-month implementation was stressful, as stated by P1: "It was a little bit stressful in the sense that the Catch-Up Fridays was cascaded to the teachers as an activity without proper orientation, and no adequate materials or resources that we can use." [Medyo stressful ta naited dayta Catch-Up Friday nga activity nga awan man laeng ti proper orientation kadagiti teachers ken awan pay materials wenno resources a mabalinmi nga usaren.] In addition, P4 recounted her experience as stressful. She elaborated, "While we were notified about this program, the preparation process, particularly for teachers with many learners, necessitates careful consideration since no guide has been given to us. Every Friday, we are tasked with developing new activities that suit and relate to them." [Stress, kasi nabagaantayo nga agpayso kaso diay preparation mo lalo no adu ti ubbing mo masapol mo nga panunoten lalo ta awan ti guide a naited. Every Friday masapol mo ti agpanunot ti different activities nga suited ken related kaniada.] In contrast, P2 and P3 characterized their overall experience as one of initial confusion. They elaborated, "We were shocked, but when they told us what to do, everything went fine, and we just followed what the formal did during the Catch-Up Fridays. [Nabigla kami ngem idi naibagadan no kasano ti pamay-an, nagbalin met nga okay, ken nakisursurotak lattan no ania ti inubra ti formal.] P5 also expressed that her overall experience was very struggling. She elaborated, "There is a lack of readily available resources despite this being a topic of discussion during the LAC session. Specifically, she highlighted the absence of online materials and clear guidelines in teaching Catch-Up Fridays each Friday. As a result, she emphasized the necessity for teachers to exercise creativity in this area." [Awan ti enough nga resources uray no nai-LAC session kanyami daytoy, awan ti online resources a pagalaan ken kasano nga isuro diay Catch-Up Fridays kada biyernes. Isunga masapol dagiti teachers nga agbalin a creative.]

The shared experiences of the five novice teacher participants in Catch-Up Fridays highlight a strong impact between having no proper orientation and a lack of materials or resources. These factors may contribute to increased stress and frustration among program implementers, which, in some cases, could manifest as having mixed emotions.

Novice teachers experienced extremely high levels of stress because of the many changes in their lives and the demands of their new jobs (Jones et al., 2020). Without a comprehensive teacher orientation program, many teachers perceived themselves as poorly prepared, inadequate resources and materials to manage their classrooms effectively, and felt isolated in transitioning into teaching (Fukkink, 2010). Program implementers may also feel stress and frustration about implementing their practice accurately without the appropriate materials or resources. According to the study by Acita et al. (2022), school districts are finding it difficult to raise the necessary funds to invest in the resources their schools need in various parts of the world. In this case, learners are impacted by the lack of resources in multiple ways. This also may add to potential emotional outbursts from novice teachers who cannot handle stressors in their new role as teachers.

Collectively, the stories of novice teachers undertaking Catch-Up Fridays reflect the possibility of the combined effects of no proper orientation and a lack of resources, which, in turn, might increase the stress levels of novice teachers, who might even question their capabilities.

#### Sub-theme 2: Being Optimistic in Enhancing Literacy Skills

Taking a positive stance on Catch-Up Fridays has the potential to alter educational results dramatically. Teachers can foster a supportive environment that supports both academic performance and personal growth by designating one day of the week for value-based learning and concentrated reading activities. This program demonstrates a progressive attitude by

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acknowledging the value of character development and literacy in creating well-rounded people. With a positive attitude, teachers can use Catch-Up Fridays to encourage reading and impart essential values, creating a generation of well-informed and morally oriented students.

All of the novice teacher participants revealed their initial thoughts and feelings about dedicating Fridays to reading activities as positive ones, as mentioned by P1, "My initial thoughts about dedicating Fridays to reading activities would be positive because I believe that this Catch-Up Fridays fosters a love for reading and then provides to our students the opportunity to improve their literacy skills. P2 explained, "I am also positive about the Catch-Up Fridays since these will help our learners develop their reading and comprehension skills." Moreover, P3 was also positive about the program and stated, "It is good at least the struggling readers were given the chance to develop their reading skills more." [La nasayaat met ta at least dagidiay struggling learners ket maikkanda ti chance tapno ti kasta ket madevelop pay met dagiti reading skillsda.] Furthermore, P4 reiterated, "The impact of having Catch-Up Fridays is also positive because it enhances the learners' capabilities," not just in reading but also in socialization, which will eventually build their confidence." P5 also agreed with her co-participants that this program will enhance the teachers' creativity.

While initial data suggests that Catch-Up Fridays may have caused stress and frustration for teachers during the first month of implementation, an optimistic outlook in enhancing literacy skills has emerged. Educators recognize the program's potential to improve and develop learners' reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, Catch-Up Fridays foster teacher creativity, encouraging them to create innovative and engaging teaching activities to enhance learning.

The study of Saro et al. (2024) on intervention programs for reading comprehension shows that teachers become more optimistic as they see initial positive student responses. It was found that teachers reported feeling encouraged by student feedback on Catch-Up Fridays, which boosted their confidence in the program's potential. It is also emphasized in the study of Frank et al. (2013) that dedicated time for focused instruction, as offered by reading intervention, can lead to increased teacher creativity, allowing teachers to experiment with new instructional methods and develop more engaging lessons.

In conclusion, despite initial challenges during the first month of implementation, Catch-Up Fridays hold promise for learners and teachers. While novice teachers experienced stress and frustration, their initial positive outlook on the program's potential for improving learner literacy remains. This optimism aligns with existing research suggesting that dedicated reading time and positive learner responses can increase teacher confidence and creativity.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the findings of the study, the researchers forwarded the following conclusions:

1. The initial implementation of Catch-Up Fridays presented significant challenges for novice teachers, resulting in a period of heightened stress, struggle, and confusion. This was due to a lack of resources and inadequate training.
2. Novice teachers remained optimistic despite the challenges they faced during the first month of implementation of Catch-Up Fridays, witnessing an improvement in their learners' literacy skills.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this research provides valuable insights into novice teachers' experiences during the first month of Catch-Up Fridays, there are a few limitations. Only five participants were involved in the research, which may limit its generalizability to other newly hired teachers. The study focused only on Unit II of the 1st District of the Schools Division of Ilocos Sur. In addition, there might have been some selection bias while applying inclusion criteria since focusing on novice teachers with 0-3 years of service may not be able to account for the experiences of those with slightly more experience who may differ in their perspectives about such programs as Catch-Up Fridays and among others. Further studies need to examine novice and nonnovice teacher perspectives, including their challenges and coping mechanisms. Another limitation is that it is short in time frame; it only represents one month of implementation. As novice teachers become more familiar with and exposed to the program, their feelings about Catch-Up Fridays may change over time. There are several shortcomings of conducting a focus group discussion as used in this study, where individuals may affect each other's replies without realizing it called groupthink.

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