

Reading Program in the National Learning Camp: Teachers' Assessment of its Implementation and Teaching Strategies

*Shannen Faith E. Soria

Eastern Visayas State University Graduate School, Tacloban City, Leyte, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the assessment of secondary teachers implementing the reading program within the National Learning Camp (NLC), designed to address pandemic-induced learning losses and enhance reading skills for Grades 7 and 8. The research addresses a significant knowledge gap by exploring the experiences and strategies of trained public school teachers in a highly urbanized city during the 2023-2024 academic year. The study aims to fulfill its objectives by investigating four key aspects. Firstly, it explores teachers' perspectives on the NLC's reading program. Secondly, it examines the strategies teachers employ during the camp's reading program. Thirdly, the study investigates the challenges encountered by teachers in executing the reading program. Lastly, it seeks recommendations from teachers to enhance future NLC reading programs. Four purposively selected teachers from Leyte National High School participated in the research. Utilizing a case study design and thematic analysis, the researcher delves into various themes such as diverse learning camps, program objectives, teacher reactions, and training. Teachers employed a range of strategies, including games, collaboration, peer tutoring, back-to-basics approaches, lectures, and module utilization. Identified challenges encompass module preparation, inappropriate materials, attendance issues, and disparities in reading skills. Teacher recommendations emphasize the importance of preparation, support for struggling readers, addressing challenges, and adapting materials. This research contributes nuanced insights into the dynamics of implementing a reading program within the NLC context. The findings offer valuable considerations for program enhancement and teacher support, providing a foundation for further improvements in the National Learning Camp initiative.

Keywords: *Reading Program, National Learning Camp, Insights and Strategies, Thematic Analysis, Case Study*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid progress of education underscores the significance of English language learning, which encompasses reading, speaking, writing, and listening skills. Reading, a foundational and lifelong skill, empowers individuals to decode and comprehend written language, enabling access to knowledge, diverse perspectives, critical thinking, and the world's collective wisdom.

Comprehension, a fundamental component of reading capabilities, involves an intricate process where readers actively engage with the text, integrating prior knowledge, experiences, and unique perspectives. Rahayu (2014) highlights the crucial role of reading proficiency in personal fulfillment and professional achievement, emphasizing its foundational importance in acquiring knowledge and comprehending diverse

subjects. However, reading challenges pose a global issue, as proved by the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), where the Philippines ranked lowest in reading comprehension. This alarming trend, supported by data from the Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey, reveals that approximately 20.1 million Filipinos struggle with comprehension (Schleicher, 2019). Decena's (2021) study underscores teachers' observations of students grappling with comprehension issues, indicating an urgent need for interventions in the Philippine education system, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted reading comprehension, leading to a decline in motivation and engagement among students, necessitating strategies to reignite enthusiasm and address challenges. Addressing the prevalent challenges in reading comprehension, Brunnett (2020) recommends a comprehensive approach involving the implementation of reading programs, the promotion of critical thinking, and the cultivation of a love for learning. In response, the Department of Education in the Philippines has taken noteworthy initiatives, exemplified by programs such as the "Every Child a Reader Program" and the "Reading Progress Tool." These strategic endeavors are designed to not only improve the quality of reading instruction but also to enhance the materials used, resulting in positive impacts on learners' overall performance.

The introduction of the National Learning Camp (NLC) under the National Learning Recovery Program is a strategic intervention to address learning losses caused by the pandemic. This program, implemented through tailored camps for specific needs, seeks to improve reading skills, particularly in Grades 7 and 8. The NLC, comprising Enhancement, Consolidation, and Intervention camps, aims to address pandemic-induced learning gaps, particularly in reading comprehension. Despite being a novel intervention, there is a notable knowledge gap regarding its teaching practices, specifically the reading program implementation. Hence, there is a need to conduct this study, which aims to delve into the valuable insights and strategies of trained public school teachers from a highly urbanized city who successfully implemented the reading program during the National Learning Camp for the academic year 2023-2024.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current paper utilized a qualitative case study that centers on interpreting individuals' personal experiences and the meanings they assign to them (Starman, 2013). The researcher's viewpoint on a situation is crucial for comprehending the study's outcomes. On the other hand, a case study analyzes and describes specific things in detail. This approach can include looking at individual people, their activities, special needs, life situations, and life histories. It can also involve examining groups of people like a school department or teaching staff. Case studies serve as a method to thoroughly investigate specific institutions, problems, processes, phenomena, or events. The qualitative approach and case study design are well-suited for this study, as they allow researchers to delve into the nuanced insights and strategies employed by teachers who participated in training and implemented the reading program during the National Learning Camp 2023 at Leyte National High School.

Research Population

The study was conducted in Leyte National High School Tacloban City, Philippines. This educational institution is a part of the Department of Education and provides a comprehensive range of academic programs from Junior High School (JHS) to Senior High School (SHS). The duration of the study spanned three months, starting in October and ending in December 2023.

Research Participants

The study's participants consist of teachers from Leyte National High School. The researcher utilized purposive sampling. In this study, the researcher intentionally selected teachers who have previously

attended training sessions on implementing the reading program at the National Learning Camp, thus, creating a homogeneous sample for the research's context.

The ideal group size for a focus group can fluctuate. A commonly recommended manageable size falls within the six to ten participants, which allows for a broad range of perspectives while maintaining order and preventing fragmentation (Krueger and Casey, 2009). In the context of Leyte National High School, four English teachers were identified as having attended training and subsequently implemented the reading program throughout the National Learning Camp 2023. Consequently, the researcher focused on these four participants in conducting the study.

Research Instrument

The data was collected through the interview. In this study, the participants were subjected to an in-depth interview (IDI) to encourage unbiased responses.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher initiated the data collection process by seeking approval from the research adviser. Upon receiving authorization for the study's data collection, a formal letter, along with informed consent forms, was sent to the school principal of Leyte National High School, seeking permission for the selected teachers' participation in the research. Data collection commenced after the chosen participants had accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

For the in-depth interview, the researcher convened the participants in a suitable venue conducive to recording the entire interview session. During this discussion, the researcher took the role of the moderator. The recommended introduction pattern consists of four key components: (1) A warm welcome, (2) An overview of the discussion topic, (3) The establishment of ground rules, and (4) The introduction of the first question (Krueger and Casey, 2009). The in-depth interview concluded once all the participants addressed all the questions outlined in the interview guide.

While still in the presence of the participants, the researcher summarized the entire discussion. This summary confirms the main points, revisits the interview's purpose, and lets participants highlight any issues overlooked. Finally, the researcher expressed gratitude for the participants' valuable input and formally dismissed them. Subsequently, the collected data underwent the process of thematic data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher secured explicit permission and consent from the participants to be involved in an in-depth interview. The teachers' decision to participate or abstain from this study has no bearing on their current employment conditions or status. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants about the recorded interview. The duration of the IDI ranged from ten to twenty minutes, taking into account factors such as the topic's complexity, the number of questions, and the number of participants involved. Therefore, it was ethical and best practice to inform the participants beforehand about the expected time commitment. Their involvement in this study was entirely voluntary, and they retained the option to withdraw at any time for any reason before the completion of the data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perspectives of Teachers Regarding the Reading Program in the National Learning Camp

Remedial reading teachers and those they engage withhold their views on reading instruction. Essentially,

their beliefs about themselves and their assumptions about others impact how they approach their responsibilities. These beliefs shape their goals regarding their work, teaching methods, and administrative duties.

In adherence to the first purpose of this study, the researcher was able to identify the teachers' different perspectives regarding the reading program in the National Learning Camp along with these themes: *learning camps, objectives, reaction to the NLC program's implementation, and training.*

1. Learning Camps

The National Learning Camp introduces three specialized camps—Enhancement, Consolidation, and Intervention—to cater to the various needs of students. The following participant's statement corroborates this:

“I think that is consolidation and intervention. The highest is enhancement, which I handle.”(Participant 4)

At Leyte National High School, the Enhancement Camp was designed for more advanced students and aims to elevate their current knowledge, skills, and comprehension of grade-level learning area competencies. This camp involves targeted activities that cultivate the depth, breadth, and complexity of understanding, and offer these students opportunities for intellectual growth. Conversely, the Intervention Camp represents the lowest level, tailored for struggling and non-reading students per DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2023. This camp provides targeted interventions in Mathematics and English and addresses foundational challenges. The goal is to support these students in improving their skills and bridging gaps in their understanding. The Consolidation Camp emphasizes reinforcing previously taught competencies. Through extensive practice and practical application, participants in this camp have the chance to establish connections between concepts and skills across various grade-level competencies. This approach fosters a more holistic grasp of the subject, ensuring a solid foundation for ongoing learning (Policy Guidelines on Implementing the National Learning Camp, 2023).

The specialized camps within the National Learning Camp framework are designed to address the diverse educational needs of students at Leyte National High School. These camps aim to cater to both advanced learners seeking enrichment and struggling students in need of targeted interventions. By doing so, the overall objective is to create a comprehensive and inclusive learning environment that takes into account the unique challenges and strengths of each student.

2. Objectives

The negative repercussions of the two years of modular learning during the pandemic have led to a notable deceleration in students' academic performance. The primary objective of the National Learning Competency (NLC) Program is to address the significant learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, with a particular emphasis on improving reading comprehension among struggling learners. The following lines substantiate the emergent theme, thus:

“The primary objective of the NLC itself is to address the learning gaps as the effect of the pandemic. Remember, during the pandemic, it was two years that students had to undergo modular modality, which negatively impacted them. So, the performance of the students slowed down. So, the purpose of the NLC is to address these gaps, not only for the students but also for the teacher. So, the training is for teachers to teach and address the learning gaps effectively.”(Participant 3)

Based on the excerpt above, the NLC seeks to bridge this gap for students and teachers, recognizing the need to adapt and overcome disruptions caused by the pandemic. The NLC program provides targeted

training for teachers to effectively address learning gaps, especially for students below their expected grade levels. The emphasis is on preventing the necessity of sending students back to lower grades, instead offering remedial support to elevate their academic progress. The Program aligns with the objectives outlined in DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2023, which emphasizes the dual purpose of the NLC—improving learning outcomes and supporting teachers in enhancing their teaching methods. In this way, the NLC aims to rectify the immediate impact of disrupted learning and to lay a more robust groundwork for the upcoming academic year. Moreover, the NLC seeks to create a camp-like atmosphere, incorporating enjoyable and captivating activities. This approach serves a dual purpose by addressing academic needs and promoting learner interests, socio-emotional skills, personal growth, and character development. The Program underscores the holistic approach required to mitigate the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic on students and educators.

3. Reaction to the NLC Program's Implementation

The teachers' reflections on their experience with the learning camp reveal a nuanced perspective, highlighting both positive aspects and challenges. Initially, perceiving the unexpected training during their expected vacation time as burdensome, they found the mandatory attendance, despite being labeled as volunteer teachers, to be a departure from their initial expectations. However, after the three-day training, their outlook shifted positively, and they embraced the role of pioneers in implementing the Program. Below are the participants' statements in connection with the emergent theme:

“The learning camp is supposed to be for volunteer teachers, but the reality in the field is that we are not really volunteers. We were told that we have to go to this training. And then, we were expecting to be on vacation at that time. So, most of the teachers feel like it is a burden. After the three days of training, we understand the need for us to have this learning camp. So, our negative perspective of the Program turned into a positive one. Moreover, later, we were also excited about how to implement the Program in the field because we were the pioneers.”(Participant 3)

“I just participated because I was required and encouraged. I also wanted to see how it goes. However, even from the start, I already felt bad about it. What is the need for it? We already have remedial classes during regular days. Although, I noticed that the students I had in the NLC are excelling right now. I have students right now who are my students in the NLC”(Participant 4)

DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2023, outlines the involvement of teachers in the National Learning Competency (NLC) program as voluntary. However, the teachers' accounts present a contrasting narrative, portraying their participation as more demanding than initially anticipated. The additional commitments extending beyond regular school days have been proven burdensome for them, leading to reconsidering the perceived voluntariness of their participation. In recognition of the teachers' dedicated involvement, the order promises vacation service credits, certificates, and other incentives. This acknowledgment aims to validate and appreciate the teachers' commitment to the Program, mitigating challenges on time commitments and potential disruptions to their vacation periods.

4. Training

The participants expressed dissatisfaction with the training, citing its perceived insufficiency and lack of preparation time, particularly in the module delivery. Real-world challenges and mistakes encountered in the field, coupled with sentiments and queries not adequately addressed during the seminar, underscored the practical limitations of the training. While serving as an eye-opener to real-world problems, time constraints hindered a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved.

Moreover, the teachers found that the Program's focus extended beyond students, requiring them to adapt

their strategies in response to field realities. They emphasized creating teaching materials and personalized methods to achieve the program goals effectively. Their disappointment in the training format was evident, with an expectation for more interactive and practical activities rather than traditional lectures.

“Oh, the training. I think it is not sufficient and it needs more time for the preparation. Especially on how we can deliver the module. So on and so forth. When we were in the field, we noticed some mistakes. Although there was a part in our seminar where we were asked about our sentiments or queries, they could have been tackled better. More instruction is needed on what to do.” (Participant 2)

When implementing the Program, we had to adjust some teaching strategies. We must rely on something other than the strategies they imparted to us during the seminar because the realities in the field differ. So, we have to adapt and make our teaching materials and strategies to effectively come up with the expected outcome from the Program (P3).

Brunnett (2020) studied the importance of reading programs in assisting teachers in refining their pedagogical approaches and involving students in meaningful reading activities. Similarly, Allington (2013) emphasizes the need for reading specialists to undergo training and gain experiences focusing on strategies for actively engaging struggling readers in a less frustrating reading environment. These findings underscore the significance of ongoing professional development for educators, especially those specializing in reading instruction, to address the needs of students facing challenges in reading.

The teachers' dissatisfaction with the training format and their call for more interactive and practical activities resonate with the broader understanding that effective professional development is not only about imparting knowledge but also about providing educators with the tools and strategies necessary to navigate the complexities of real-world teaching. Addressing these concerns can provide teachers and students with a more effective and supportive learning environment.

Strategies Employed by the Teachers in the Reading Program during the National Learning Camp

In the teaching of reading, teachers employ various strategies, and the choice of an appropriate strategy can significantly impact students' comprehension of the material.

The participants discussed their teaching strategies during the National Learning Competency (NLC) program. The researcher successfully fulfilled the second purpose of the study by identifying various strategies employed by the teachers in the reading program in the National Learning Camp, encapsulating these insights within specific themes: *incorporation of games and fun activities, collaboration and peer tutoring, back to basic, and lecture and module activities*. In addition to the strategies, the themes of *addressing diverse needs and success stories/testimonials* were also included.

1. Incorporation of Games and Fun Activities

The teachers implementing the reading program have adopted a creative approach, incorporating games to make lessons enjoyable, particularly for non-readers. The seamless integration of group activities, puzzles, and outdoor exercises emerged as the most effective strategy in the reading program. This strategy aligns with the theme of the positive impact of game-based activities on learners' motivation. The following lines substantiate this theme:

“We used and incorporated games in our lessons to make them fun for the students.” (Participant 1)

“We tried to make it fun because it is a camp. We inserted some activities. Oh, even the classes. We tried to do it in a fun way. It is not boring, no lecture type. Most of us would give them group activities. Some of us

would make them go outside to do something. They would do activities outdoors. They were running around at the school campus because only a few were in school then.” (Participant 4)

Clarissa’s (2021) perspective further supports this theme, emphasizing that a reading program should inject enjoyment and engagement into the learning process. Games, incentives, stories, and characters that resonate with learners’ interests and motivations are crucial for fostering a positive learning environment.

Sørensen and Meyer (2007) underscore the significance of games in fostering motivation and encouraging authentic communicative practices in the language classroom. It aligns with the teachers’ strategy of integrating games to engage students actively in the reading program. The learner-centered nature of games, offering opportunities for active participation, is highlighted by Mekler et al. (2016), further reinforcing the effectiveness of the teachers’ approach.

Castillo-Cuesta’s (2022) study adds empirical support to this theme, noting a notable increase in student scores, particularly in reading skills. The study observed enhanced proficiency in identifying main ideas, supporting details, and other elements within a reading passage when incorporating game-based activities into the learning process.

Moreover, a kinesthetic study on reading development conducted by Dockstader, and Stewart (2006) provides evidence suggesting that kinesthetic learning contributes to improved reading development. It complements the teachers’ strategy of incorporating outdoor activities, underlining the importance of multisensory approaches to enhance reading skills.

In summary, the teachers’ use of game-based activities aligns with educational research and studies, affirming the positive impact of such strategies on learners’ motivation and reading proficiency. This creative and engaging approach makes the learning process enjoyable and caters to diverse learning styles, ultimately contributing to the success of the reading program.

2. Collaboration and Peer Tutoring

The reading program incorporates a collaborative and interactive approach, where students who excel in reading are encouraged to teach their classmates. Collaboration learning and open communication promote enhanced students’ reading skills, and collaborative teaching emphasizes teachers alternating roles. Additionally, volunteer teachers hold consultation meetings weekly to discuss progress and address challenges encountered in implementing the reading program. Below are the participants’ statements regarding this theme:

“We did collaborative teaching. While the other executes the lesson, I teach reading, then vice-versa. In a week, we have a consultation of all teachers who attended the training.”(Participant 2)

“We want to teach the students the importance of collaboration. So, once we identify good readers, we will let them teach to their classmates.” (Participant 3)

“For me, it is collaborative learning. Sometimes, the students must remember their motivation, so we must keep motivating them more than usual. We give them fun activities. More on collaboration so they can talk to each other, especially since they come from different sections and schools.” (Participant 4)

These practices align with educational theories and research. Whitman (1988) asserts that learners can collaborate as equals, fostering a deeper understanding of materials through peer teaching. Both tutors and tutees experience increased self-confidence, with tutors recognizing their competence in assisting others and the tutees gaining confidence through positive reinforcement (Topping, 1996).

Rahmasari's (2017) study on the impact of peer tutoring (PT) on first-grade students' reading comprehension supports the idea that peer tutoring improves and enhances students' reading comprehension achievements. Similarly, the study of Blanch et al. (2012) highlights the positive outcomes of peer tutoring in supporting reading comprehension.

In the realm of collaborative teaching, Henwood's (2000) study, as cited in Gatcho et al. (2019), emphasizes the efficacy of collaboration between reading specialists and classroom teachers in meeting the literacy needs of students. This collaborative approach has improved teachers' instructional strategies, benefiting students' literacy needs. Frost (2007) reinforces this by asserting that reading specialists when viewed as resource persons or collaborative consultants, play a crucial role in enhancing professional literacy instruction delivered by teachers.

Incorporating peer tutoring, collaborative learning, and open communication in the reading program aligns with established educational theories and research. These practices enhance students' reading skills and contribute to the professional development of tutors and teachers. The consultation meetings further demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement and problem-solving in implementing the reading program.

3. Back to basics

Upon assessing students' reading abilities, the teachers identified that some grade 7 and 8 students struggled with basic reading skills. Teachers implemented remedial efforts involving a return to teaching the alphabet and utilizing innovative materials such as "Marungko" for reading activities. One teacher mentioned that spoon-feeding became the intervention camp's most effective teaching method for non-readers.

"Sometimes, it is frustrating to find out that although the student is already in grade seven, some students cannot read words. Some students cannot even recognize the alphabet. That needs an intervention, and then I have to go back to the basics of teaching alphabets and words to the point that we plan to use Marungko. The reading strategy or material is used to teach elementary students. It is, for example, based on sounds. It is going back to the basics." (Participant 3)

The reading strategy aligns with the bottom-up approach, rooted in phonics teaching as its theoretical foundation. Like the audio-lingual method, this approach breaks down information into small sound units and emphasizes the practice of sounds composing words (Omaggio, 1993, as cited in Pardede, 2013). Supporting this, the National Reading Panel's study (2000) suggests that explicit and systematic phonics instruction is particularly effective for struggling readers. Joseph and Schisler (2008) further affirm that providing adolescents with direct instruction in word reading skills yields positive outcomes in reading achievement.

Balgua's (2022) study, focusing on the efficacy of Reading Modules using the Marungko Approach among Grade One pupils in Zambales, Philippines, adds empirical support to this approach. The research emphasizes the effectiveness of explicit, systematic instruction procedures, including prerequisite skill development, modeling techniques, error correction, active student participation, repeated practice, and learning reinforcement. Balgua endorsed the Marungko approach as the optimal method for word decoding, reading speed development, and enhancing reading comprehension.

The emerging theme associated with lecture and module activities indicates a multifaceted approach to teaching, incorporating various instructional methods to cater to the diverse needs of students. The emphasis on explicit and systematic instruction, coupled with innovative materials and individualized approaches like spoon-feeding, showcases a commitment to addressing the specific challenges struggling readers face in the intervention camp.

4. Lecture and Module Activities

The participants identified the lecture and module activities provided by the central office as the least effective strategies, perceived as visual and less engaging. Teachers found limitations in PowerPoint presentations and provided modules, preferring other methods they considered more effective. The following statements substantiate this theme:

“The least effective is the one given to us by the central office. They gave us a module, and we were asked to follow it, but we found it ineffective because we only focused on comprehension. It was not fun for them. So, on the second day, we were told to incorporate games so the students would learn.” (Participant 1)

“The traditional strategies. The lecture strategies. They find it boring in the first few days. They probably will not come anymore.” (Participant 4)

The criticism of the lecture method aligns with the findings of Maphosa and Ndebele (2014), who argue against the conventional lecture method due to its one-way transmission of information and reliance on rote memorization. Warawudhi (2012) adds to these concerns, noting the impracticality of individualized assessment in large classes during reading comprehension exercises, limiting student-teacher and peer interaction opportunities and leading to passive learning stances among students.

Concerning the use of modules, Catuiran (2022) underscores the significance of well-structured and varied reading materials in interventions targeting improved reading skills. Paulston (1976) emphasizes the purposeful selection of reading materials from local sources for ESL students to understand the text. Carrell (1983) advocates developing reading materials from local sources, such as booklets, books, magazines, newspapers, and brochures, making content relevant to daily life routines and enhancing students' connection with and comprehension of the material. Berardo (2009) further emphasizes the value of internet-sourced materials in improving reading comprehension (Catuiran, 2022).

The critique of traditional lecture methods and the call for more interactive and participatory approaches resonate with educational research, highlighting the need for varied and engaging strategies in reading programs. Similarly, the emphasis on purposeful selection and development of reading materials from local sources aligns with creating contextually relevant content to enhance reading comprehension.

5. Addressing Diverse Needs

The participants reflect on the success of addressing diverse needs during the National Learning Competency (NLC) program, highlighting a 50-50 success rate. While recognizing positive outcomes and participant enjoyment, they also acknowledge room for improvement. As pioneers in the Program, they navigated uncharted waters and faced challenges in implementing strategies taught during the seminar.

Looking forward to the upcoming summer, they are willing to volunteer again, anticipating additional activities and improvements. The participants emphasize students' diverse preferences, with some inclined toward reading while others prefer writing or acting. The teachers' approach involves offering a variety of activities and encouraging students to try different methods, fostering an inclusive and participatory learning environment. The submission here is evident in the following participants' statements.

“For that particular year, yes. However, there is room for improvement.” (Participant 3).

“Yes, I think so because they are different. Some of them want to read, and some of them enjoy writing. If they want to act, I make them act, and I make them read. Everything. They have to go through it. There are

no other options; you do it. You try this, try that.” (Participant 4).

These reflections align with Meo’s (2008) study, which emphasizes fostering inclusivity in high-quality, standards-based educational settings. Meo underscores the importance of educators and researchers scrutinizing the curriculum for potential barriers and supports to academic achievement among diverse learners. By adopting an inclusive approach to curriculum development, educators contribute to creating a learning environment that embraces diversity and provides equitable opportunities for academic success.

In the context of the NLC program, the participants’ acknowledgment of the diverse preferences of students and their commitment to offering a variety of activities resonates with Meo’s emphasis on inclusivity. The willingness to volunteer again and the anticipation of additional activities and improvements indicate a proactive approach to addressing the challenges encountered, reinforcing the commitment to continuous improvement and creating an inclusive learning environment.

6. Success Stories and Testimonials

The teachers in the NLC program emphasized the joy and improvement experienced by students in reading skills, along with the positive impact on their attitude towards learning and school. Below are the testimonials shared by the participants:

“From my side, I handled 14-, 15-, and 16-year-old students who cannot read yet. So, I felt satisfied that I was able to help them read. The parent wanted the child to stop attending school because he cannot read yet. So, I tried to help the student. That 16-year-old student can at least read CVC words like cat and dog.” (Participant 1)

“They shared that they learned, especially those in the other camps. I can see by action. Some of them are my students right now. They are like the ones at the top of the class. It still needs to be confirmed if NLC has something to do with it.” (Participant 4)

These success stories align with the findings of Pocaan et al. (2022), where the results of a reading remedial program showcased a noteworthy advancement in participants’ reading abilities. The progression was evident as they moved from the frustration level observed in the pretests to levels indicative of instructional and independent reading. Similarly, the study conducted by Balinas et al. (2017) also yielded findings that emphasized the positive impact of a remedial reading program on participants’ reading performance. This study was substantiated by notable disparities in the pretest and posttest results, signifying significant improvements in the assessed reading skills.

The alignment of the teachers’ observations with the findings of these studies adds credibility to the positive impact of reading programs on students’ reading abilities and overall attitude toward learning. The evidence suggests that targeted interventions and remedial programs can significantly improve students’ reading skills and foster a positive learning environment.

Challenges Encountered and Solutions/Interventions Applied in Implementing the Reading Program During the National Learning Camp

The educational system in the Philippines faces a significant challenge in cultivating effective readers. The 2019 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) statistics reveal that Filipino pupils performed less proficiently in reading comprehension compared to their international counterparts. This underscores the necessity to address existing obstacles and identify potential areas for improvement in the

reading abilities of Filipino children. Recognizing these challenges is crucial for implementing targeted interventions and reforms aimed at enhancing the overall reading proficiency of students in the country.

The participants discussed various challenges faced during the implementation of the National Learning Competency (NLC) program and the solutions or interventions applied to overcome them. The researcher accomplished the third purpose of the study by identifying the challenges encountered and the solutions/interventions applied by the teachers in implementing the reading program during the NLC. These insights were organized and presented within specific themes: *module preparation, inappropriate materials, attendance and lack of food, reading skills, and different camp experiences.*

1. Module Preparation

The challenge faced by the team was preparing modules on time despite receiving soft copies from the central office. The succeeding statement substantiates this theme:

“One challenge we conquered was the preparation of the modules because the central office sent us the soft copies, and we had already been given the modules during classes.” (Participant 1)

This issue resonates with the findings of the study conducted by Mule (2014). Mule’s analysis suggests that inadequate English reading materials contribute to reading difficulties in English. The challenge of timely module preparation underscores the importance of addressing issues related to the quality and quantity of reading materials. By enhancing the availability and preparation process of such materials, educators can contribute to mitigating reading difficulties in students. These implications highlight the significance of ensuring that appropriate and timely resources are accessible to support effective learning and address challenges in English reading.

2. Inappropriate Materials

The participants observed that the materials provided by the central office are inappropriate for learners, leading to boredom. Below are statements that corroborate this theme:

“From what I have observed in the materials provided, the contents were repetitive.” (Participant 2)

“During the first week of the implementation, we found out that the materials do not match the needs of the students here. So that was our first concern. We raised it and asked if we could design our materials. Their materials are focused on learners in the cities. It is not contextualized.” (Participant 3)

This problem highlights a significant issue that aligns with the findings of Yigiterand Gurses(2005). The researchers assert that teachers can play a crucial role in improving students’ reading comprehension by carefully selecting reading materials that align with their interests, backgrounds, and reading levels. Students exposed to materials that resonate with their preferences and abilities are more likely to engage with the content on a deeper level, fostering a more profound understanding of the topic.

The request to use contextualized materials and the insistence on collaborative planning to ensure alignment of activities with objectives reflects a commitment to enhancing the relevance and appropriateness of the materials used in the reading program. This implication aligns with the broader understanding that tailored, contextually relevant materials contribute to more effective and engaging student learning experiences.

3. Attendance and Provision of Snacks

The challenges faced by students, particularly those coming from less fortunate families and having to leave

for home due to a lack of provisions for lunch or snacks, are associated with the reading program. The following lines further substantiate this theme:

“Instead of staying here the whole day, they only stay here for half a day because they must go home. They do not have lunch or snacks provided. Although we were told we may provide them with food, I still need the budget.” (Participant 1)

“Sometimes, teachers would spend money from their own pockets [to buy snacks] so that students would participate in the discussion.” (Participant 2)

Aryandani et al. (2021) elaborate on how decreased motivation and engagement can result in diminished interest in reading. The challenges observed, including absenteeism due to distance and socioeconomic status influencing reading competence, align with broader educational research. Aryandani, et al.’s study, emphasizes the importance of motivation and engagement in the learning process, linking it directly to interest in reading. The observation that teachers sometimes use their own money to provide snacks as a solution speaks to the dedication of educators in addressing these challenges and fostering a positive learning environment.

Moreover, Idulog et al. (2023) highlighted the connection between absenteeism, mainly due to distance from schools, and difficulties in reading comprehension. The challenges students face in accessing education, including the financial constraints leading to a lack of provisions, contribute to absenteeism and, consequently, impact their reading skills. Referring to the Philippines’ PISA 2018 profile, Cruz (2021) reinforces socioeconomic status’s influence on reading competence. The profile underscores that students with lower socioeconomic status are likelier to demonstrate lower reading proficiency than their peers. The challenges students face in the NLC program reflect these broader socioeconomic factors that impact educational outcomes.

In summary, the challenges related to students’ socioeconomic status, absenteeism, and the lack of provisions observed by the participants align with existing research on the multifaceted factors influencing reading proficiency and overall engagement in the learning process.

4. Reading Skills and Different Camp Experiences

The challenges with inappropriate materials and evaluations within the NLC camps have varied experiences among different learning camps. Teachers in the intervention camp found it challenging to teach non-readers due to materials unsuitable for their learning level. However, Participant 4, representing the enhancement camp, noted that reading was okay for their students with good reading abilities, and the materials were considered appropriate for the learners in the enhancement camp. Below is the participant’s statement:

“They are good at reading. I could see. I do not know. There is not much challenge in that part. Maybe it is just comprehension. It could be just comprehension questions. Sometimes, they make mistakes. But only a few. The level of difficulty of the words was okay. They were appropriate for their level. They did not struggle. I do not know about the other camps.” (Participant 4)

The insights from Idulog et al.’s (2023) study provide a comprehensive overview of various methods through which readers can enhance their vocabulary and reading comprehension. The study emphasizes exploring multiple genres and themes, actively seeking definitions for unfamiliar words, and utilizing vocabulary-building applications or games. Adjusting reading pace is an effective strategy for improving understanding, recognizing that different texts may require different reading speeds. Experimenting with varying reading speeds allows readers to determine the reading pace that suits them best. Also, leveraging existing knowledge as a valuable tool for grasping the reading material is important. A robust vocabulary is

essential for comprehending a wide variety of texts.

Engaging multiple senses is also recommended as a technique for improving understanding, with some readers benefiting from reading a text aloud to activate both visual and auditory senses. Additionally, taking notes or creating diagrams can aid in visualizing and retaining crucial information. Using multiple senses contributes to a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the material.

These strategies can be considered and adapted in the different NLC camps, recognizing students' diverse needs and abilities across various learning levels. Adjusting teaching approaches based on individual camp requirements may contribute to more effective and tailored interventions.

Recommendations of Teachers for the Improvement of the Reading Program in the National Learning Camp

Given the challenges faced by teachers and students in implementing the reading program during the National Learning Camp, it is imperative to initiate robust and concerted efforts to provide the necessary remediation and support. Participants were asked for their recommendations, and several key themes emerged, underscoring the need for focused attention on specific areas: *preparation, encouraging struggling readers, addressing reading challenges, and adapting materials to different levels.*

1. Preparation

The central office's materials provided for seventh and eighth-grade students need to be more inclusive, covering English comprehension for grades 5 and 6. Below is a participant's suggestion focusing on proper preparation, operation with motion, and budget allocation.

“We must prepare since we are told to follow what the central office gives us. They have to start from the lower level. Our training focused on seventh and eighth-grade students. They also have to include in their preparation the level for English comprehension, level 5 or level 6, to be given to the grade 7 and 8 students. That is our level. That is only for the preparation, the operation with motion, and the budget.” (Participant 1)

The study of RTI International (2019) revealed that various factors, including teacher quality, instructional time, and school resources may significantly impact reading achievement. Specifically, remedial reading teachers, as highlighted by the International Reading Association (IRA, 2018), are highly skilled professionals dedicated to improving the reading abilities of all students, with a particular emphasis on assisting those facing reading difficulties, as Gatcho's et al (2019) study submitted. The study underscores the multifaceted nature of factors influencing reading achievement and the pivotal role of remedial reading teachers in addressing challenges. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance reading comprehension and literacy education, including proper preparation, operational efficiency, and adequate resource allocation.

Beyond directly instructing struggling readers, these teachers play a pivotal role as valuable resources for their peers. They guide to enhance teaching methods related to literacy education within the broader teaching community. In essence, these highlight the importance of proactive preparation at various levels, including initial teacher training, continuous professional development, resource allocation, and policy planning, to address challenges in reading achievement and create an environment conducive to effective literacy education.

2. Encouraging Struggling Readers

Teachers express concern about students progressing to higher grades without adequate reading skills,

emphasizing the need for strict guidelines at elementary levels. Prioritizing the encouragement of struggling readers to participate is crucial, as above-average students tend to show more interest. Below is a participant's statement in relation with this theme.

“I think it is important to prioritize the encouragement of struggling readers to participate/attend. The above-average students were more interested than them.”(Participant 2)

The general focus of reading programs often targets students with lower academic performance, as evidenced by Jameel Poverty Action Lab's evaluation of the “Sa Aklat Sisikat” (SAS) reading program in 2009 (Abeberese et al., 2014). This evaluation revealed positive and enduring impacts on literacy levels and academic performance for students with lower performance levels. In light of this, Idulog et al. (2023) advocate for educators to prioritize and invest in high-quality reading instruction and support, especially for students facing challenges or those at risk of falling behind. The implication is that targeted interventions and support can positively impact the academic outcomes of students struggling with their reading skills.

Additionally, the relationship between teachers and students is a pivotal factor influencing learning outcomes and motivation. Positive teacher-student connections consistently link to higher academic achievement, increased engagement, and reduced behavior problems and mental distress. This notion underscores the importance of fostering a positive and supportive learning environment where teachers actively engage with their students, creating a conducive atmosphere for enhanced learning outcomes.

The teachers' concerns about students progressing without adequate reading skills align with the broader understanding that early intervention and targeted support are critical in ensuring that all students, regardless of their performance levels, have the necessary foundational skills for academic success.

3. Addressing Reading Challenges

There is a call for a more effective reading program for the National Learning Camp (NLC) and general reading programs. Participant 3 proposes being strict at elementary levels to address reading challenges effectively. Highlighting a challenge, the teacher discusses the difficulty of addressing varying reading levels within the same grade, emphasizing the need to strengthen the foundation in earlier years. When students in higher grades have reading skills equivalent to lower levels, they must backtrack to elementary levels to strengthen foundational skills.

The truth is, if we only focus on the first three years of pupils and reading, and then if the DepEd is strict in its guidance and rules, not to pass learners who cannot read to the next grade, we will not have a problem in the whole school because it is a big question mark. How did this student become a grade nine or ten student even if they cannot read? If the student can recognize letters, it is not a non-reader. That is just struggling. However, if we want to have an effective reading program for the NLC, not only for the NLC but the reading program alone, we should be strict at the elementary level. The reading program that we develop for grade 7 is to enhance their reading level. However, when you have this diagnostic test, you will find out that although this student is in grade 7 already, his or her reading skill is still in grade 2. That is a struggle, a challenge that we teachers here in the field have difficulty addressing. The problem should be addressed at the elementary level (P3).

The findings from Decena's 2021 study and insights from Sasan and Rabillas (2022) emphasize students' pervasive challenges in reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge within the Philippine education system. These challenges have far-reaching consequences on academic performance, motivation, and engagement in the learning process. The urgency of addressing these issues is highlighted by the government's implementation of the “Every Child a Reader Program” through DepEd Order No. 45 series of 2022, which aims to ensure proficiency in reading by the time the student is in grade three.

However, as highlighted by Participant 3's narrative, there is a call for a more robust implementation of such programs, particularly at the elementary level, with the recognition of its potential butterfly effect on students' performance in high school. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement comprehensive reading programs that are responsive to the diverse needs of learners. Such programs should incorporate evidence-based instructional strategies, provide relevant and engaging reading materials, and offer targeted support designed for students with reading difficulties.

In summary, the call for a more effective reading program, acknowledging challenges in addressing varying reading levels and the need for a more robust foundation at the elementary level, emphasizes the importance of comprehensive and well-implemented reading initiatives to ensure students' success throughout their academic journey.

4. Adapting Materials to Different Levels

The enhancement camp adjusts materials according to the students' higher levels, while other camps may need to go back to basics. According to Participant 4, acknowledging students' actual level and providing materials from the elementary level is essential for effective teaching.

Speaking on behalf of the enhancement camp, they tried to adjust the material according to their level. If they are at the enhancement level, they no longer need that much help. However, go back to the basics for those in the other camps. Well, they are in grade eight, but we will give them materials from the elementary level. That is their actual level. They are not high school level yet (P4).

This theme stresses the crucial importance of ensuring that reading programs have reading materials that are both comprehensive and adaptable. There is a clear recognition of the need to understand and acknowledge learners' actual reading comprehension levels. The research by Watson et al. (2012) underscores the positive impact of a reading program characterized by engaging and relevant materials and evidence-based instructional strategies. This approach resulted in significant improvements in learners' reading comprehension and motivation.

Similarly, Kilag et al. (2023) highlight the importance of effective reading programs that foster frequent reading habits and provide engaging materials. Aranego's (2023) recommendation for a robust and comprehensive reading recovery program further aligns with these findings, emphasizing the need to address struggling readers' multifaceted challenges. Such a program should encompass support materials to enhance reading proficiency and contribute to overall academic improvement.

The emphasis on adapting materials to students' levels and providing materials from elementary grades highlights the need for flexibility and individualized approaches within reading programs. It underscores the importance of aligning instructional materials with learners' comprehension levels to create an environment that promotes effective learning and addresses the diverse needs of students across different camps.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the themes that emerged from teachers' perspectives, strategies, challenges, and recommendations provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced insights into the dynamics of implementing a reading program.

The NLC, comprising Enhancement, Consolidation, and Intervention camps, aims to address pandemic-induced learning gaps, particularly in reading comprehension. While some teachers express positive experiences and believe in the Program's impact, others question its necessity due to perceived time

demands. Dissatisfaction with training adequacy and preparation time is evident, emphasizing the need for comprehensive professional development.

While implementing the reading program in the National Learning Camp, the volunteer teachers employed various strategies for teaching reading. The findings highlight the effectiveness of game-based activities in enhancing motivation and engagement, the positive impact of collaborative learning and peer tutoring on reading skills, the necessity of addressing basic reading skills through methods like the Marungko approach, and the limitations of traditional lecture and module activities.

The challenges and solutions identified by the teachers highlight the necessity of contextualized materials, effective communication, and addressing specific needs to improve reading proficiency.

Lastly, the recommendations underscore the need for comprehensive and adaptable reading programs that address the diverse needs of learners. Proactive preparation, encouragement for struggling readers, effective solutions for reading challenges, and adapting materials to different levels are crucial to improving the reading program in the National Learning Camp. Implementing these recommendations can contribute significantly to enhancing reading proficiency among Filipino students.

RECOMMENDATION CITATION

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