

PROFICIENCY LEVELS OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS, CARMEN 3 DISTRICT, DIVISION OF BOHOL

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ABSTRACT

Article history:

Submission: 14 Jan 2025

Revised: 8 March 2025

Accepted: 17 Aug 2025

Publication: 7 Sept 2025

Keywords - reading proficiency, Catch-Up Fridays, reading comprehension, vocabulary, reading fluency, literacy intervention, mixed methods, senior high school

Reading proficiency remains fundamental to learners' academic success and lifelong learning, underscoring the need for effective school-based literacy interventions. This study examined the reading proficiency of Grade 11 learners. It explored stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of the Catch-Up Fridays Program in selected public senior high schools in Carmen 3 District, Division of Bohol, Philippines. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were obtained from 230 learners using validated assessments of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency administered before and after the intervention. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with school principals, National Learning Camp coordinators, and English teachers, and analyzed using the OECD Evaluation Framework. Descriptive statistics, paired-samples t-tests, and one-way analysis of variance were used to analyze quantitative data, while thematic analysis was applied



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to qualitative responses. The findings indicated statistically significant improvements across all three domains of reading proficiency following participation in the program. Stakeholders likewise viewed the program as relevant, coherent, and beneficial in strengthening learners' reading engagement despite challenges related to instructional resources, implementation time, and sustainability. Overall, the findings suggest that structured literacy initiatives implemented through collaborative school support may help improve adolescent reading proficiency while providing valuable insights for the ongoing enhancement of literacy recovery programs.

INTRODUCTION

Reading proficiency remains one of the most fundamental competencies that underpin learners' academic achievement, lifelong learning, and meaningful participation in society. Beyond the ability to decode written text, proficient reading involves constructing meaning, integrating prior knowledge, evaluating information critically, and applying comprehension across diverse contexts. These competencies become increasingly important in senior high school, where learners are expected to engage with complex academic texts, synthesize information from multiple sources, and demonstrate higher-order thinking skills across disciplines.

Despite sustained educational reforms, reading proficiency remains a significant challenge in many educational systems. International large-scale assessments have consistently reported substantial disparities in learners' reading performance, particularly among students from developing countries. Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) continue to indicate that many Filipino learners perform below the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average in reading literacy, suggesting persistent learning gaps that warrant sustained instructional and policy attention (OECD, 2023). Reading proficiency is increasingly recognized not only as a language competency but also as a foundational skill that supports achievement across mathematics, science, social sciences, and other learning areas.

Reading is widely acknowledged as a multidimensional process involving vocabulary knowledge, language comprehension, reading fluency, and strategic thinking. Contemporary models of reading emphasize that successful comprehension results from the interaction of word recognition, linguistic competence, cognitive processing, and metacognitive regulation (Kim, 2020). Learners who possess well-developed vocabulary and fluent reading skills are generally better able to construct meaning from increasingly sophisticated texts. In contrast, limitations in any of these components may hinder comprehension and overall academic performance.

Within the Philippine educational context, improving literacy has become a national priority. The Department of Education introduced the

National Learning Recovery Program and subsequently institutionalized the Catch-Up Fridays Program to address learning losses resulting from prolonged educational disruptions. The initiative seeks to strengthen foundational literacy, foster independent reading habits, and provide learners with additional opportunities to develop essential competencies through structured reading activities integrated into the regular school program. While the initiative demonstrates considerable promise, its implementation may vary across schools depending on contextual factors such as instructional practices, available resources, teacher preparedness, and stakeholder support.

Emerging evidence suggests that structured reading interventions can contribute positively to learners' reading development when they incorporate explicit instruction, repeated practice, meaningful engagement with authentic texts, and continuous assessment (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Likewise, vocabulary enrichment, guided oral reading, and scaffolded comprehension instruction have been associated with improved literacy outcomes among adolescent learners (Cervetti et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of school-based literacy initiatives depends largely on how they are implemented in specific educational settings and on how stakeholders perceive their relevance, coherence, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

Although numerous studies have examined reading interventions in elementary education, relatively few have focused on senior high school learners, whose literacy demands differ considerably due to increasingly disciplinary and academic forms of reading. Furthermore, empirical evidence on the implementation of the Catch-Up Fridays Program remains limited, particularly from multiple stakeholder perspectives and within the framework of internationally recognized evaluation criteria. Consequently, there remains a need to generate context-specific evidence that examines both learners' reading outcomes and stakeholder experiences to inform continuous improvement of literacy interventions.

The present study responds to this need by examining the reading proficiency of Grade 11 learners in terms of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency before and after participation in literacy intervention activities implemented through the Catch-Up Fridays Program. Complementing the quantitative assessment, the study also explores the perspectives of school principals, program coordinators, and English teachers on the program's implementation, using the OECD Evaluation Framework. Integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence provides a more comprehensive understanding of learner outcomes and implementation processes, thereby generating practical insights to strengthen literacy instruction and support evidence-informed educational decision-making.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on adolescent literacy by providing empirical evidence from a Philippine public-school context. The findings may inform school leaders, teachers, curriculum planners, and policymakers in refining literacy interventions, optimizing

implementation strategies, and strengthening learning recovery initiatives designed to improve reading proficiency among senior high school learners.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The four theories that support this study are the Simple View of Reading, the Reading Systems Framework, Sociocultural Theory, and Bruner's Theory of Scaffolding. These theories explain how reading skills develop and how organized literacy interventions are implemented. According to Gough and Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading, reading comprehension comprises two main parts: word recognition and language comprehension. Learners become competent readers when they can correctly spot words and figure out what they mean from the text at the same time. If either part is not working right, it could affect how well you read altogether. A recent study on literacy has added to this theory by showing that vocabulary, past knowledge, and executive functioning all play a big role in reading comprehension, especially for teenagers (Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

The Reading Systems Framework adds to this view by viewing reading as a process that includes language skills, thinking skills, reading speed, vocabulary expansion, and planning for understanding what you read (Kim, 2020). Instead of seeing reading as a single skill, the framework sees it as a set of interconnected processes that work together to make reading easier. So, treatments that target vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension simultaneously are more likely to improve overall reading skills than methods that focus on only one or two of these areas.

The study is likewise informed by **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory**, which emphasizes that learning develops through meaningful social interaction within learners' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Guided instruction, collaborative learning, teacher feedback, and peer interaction provide opportunities for learners to construct knowledge that they may not yet be able to achieve independently. Within the context of the Catch-Up Fridays Program, literacy activities conducted collaboratively with teachers and peers may strengthen reading development by providing structured opportunities for guided practice.

Lastly, Bruner's Theory of Scaffolding describes how learners can get better at doing more difficult tasks with brief help from teachers until they can do them on their own (Bruner, 1978). Scaffolded concepts are closely related to reading lessons that use guided questions, explicit vocabulary instruction, repeated reading, and gradually transferring more responsibility. These teaching aids are especially useful for students who have trouble reading because they help them better understand what they read and read more quickly.

Reading competence is a multidimensional concept influenced by cognitive, linguistic, educational, and social factors. These ideas make up a complete framework for understanding comprehension. They also provide

theoretical support for organized literacy interventions such as the Catch-Up Fridays Program, which combines explicit instruction, guided reading, and opportunities to work together to learn.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading Proficiency as a Foundation of Academic Learning. Many people agree that being able to read well is one of the best predictors of how well someone will do in school. It helps students understand disciplinary texts, think critically about knowledge, and engage in academic discourse in a useful way. Literacy experts today say that being able to read well involves more than just recognizing words. They say it also involves critical thinking, figuring out what words mean in context, and understanding what they read strategically (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Because of this, students who are better at reading tend to do better in school across a wide range of subjects.

International tests continue to show persistent differences in how well teens read. Many students have trouble understanding complex texts, synthesizing information from different sources, and assessing the reliability of evidence (OECD, 2023), according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). These results show how important it is to keep teaching reading and writing after elementary school.

Vocabulary, Fluency, and Reading Comprehension. A person's reading comprehension grows as they deal with several related factors, mainly their vocabulary, reading speed, and language understanding. The vocabulary we use provides the language skills we need to understand more complex academic texts (Cervetti et al., 2020). People who are learning are usually better at figuring out what things mean, seeing how they relate to each other, and understanding things they do not fully understand.

Furthermore, reading quickly also helps a lot with understanding. Fluent readers use fewer mental resources to recognize words, which lets them focus more on making sense of writing (Kim, 2020). Research shows that fluency, language, and understanding are all positively linked across secondary education. This means these areas should be addressed together, not separately.

Effective Reading Interventions. More and more evidence supports structured literacy programs that include explicit instruction, guided practice, repeated reading, vocabulary building, and formative assessment. As Duke and Cartwright (2021) noted, effective reading instruction does not focus solely on decoding or comprehension but integrates multiple aspects of literacy. Systematic vocabulary instruction, collaborative reading, and scaffolded questions have also been shown to help students perform better in reading across a variety of school settings. Recent studies also emphasize the importance of long-term interventions rather than one-time fixes. Reading practice that lasts a long time, with teacher comments and individualized lessons, seems to lead to better long-

term learning outcomes than short-term activities alone.

Learning Recovery and School-Based Literacy Programs. After many problems with schools, many countries started implementing learning recovery programs to help kids who had lost their reading skills. These programs usually focus on building basic skills, providing specific training, and conducting ongoing testing to help students who need extra support in the classroom.

The Catch-Up Fridays Program is part of the National Learning Recovery Program in the Philippines. The Department of Education made it official. Literacy development is given specific time in the school day as part of the program, and schools are encouraged to use contextualized reading tasks that improve students' understanding, vocabulary, and interest in reading. The strategy shows a strong desire to improve literacy, but there is little real-world evidence of its effectiveness or implementation, especially among high school seniors.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

Studies always show that organized reading interventions help students improve their reading and writing skills. Scammacca et al. (2015) did a meta-analysis of teenage reading programs. They found that formal comprehension teaching, vocabulary development, and guided reading all led to small but real gains in reading performance among high school students. The results showed that systematic instructional support for students who are having trouble reading is important, even though the benefits of the interventions varied across studies.

More recent studies show that teaching words and reading over and over again are both very important for improving reading comprehension and speed. Cervetti et al. (2020) found that teaching words through real-life reading tasks helps students understand increasingly difficult texts. Additionally, Kim (2020) stressed that improving reading speed leads to better understanding by reducing the mental demands of memorizing words. Interventions to improve reading have also shown positive results in the Philippines. The 4Rs (Read, Retell, React, Reflect) approach helped junior high school students understand what they were reading a lot better, according to Deluao et al. (2022). Maribbay (2022) also found that reading habits and comprehension were positively related among senior high school students. This suggests that staying interested in reading materials over time can help students do better in reading.

Because the Catch-Up Fridays Program is so new, there are not many studies that focus on it directly yet. Existing studies mostly discuss implementation experiences, teachers' views, and practical obstacles, but they do not examine measured student outcomes. Early reports indicate that schools generally like the program, but they are concerned about teaching tools, student involvement, teacher stress, and the program's long-term viability. These results show that

policy adoption is not the only factor that drives implementation; institutions also need adequate support, and programs need to be evaluated regularly.

Even though there is more and more writing about reading solutions, there are still three big holes. First, few studies have directly examined high school seniors, whose reading and writing needs differ markedly from those of elementary and middle school students. Second, not much real-world research has looked at both how well students read and how stakeholders felt about the application process at the same time, using a mixed-methods technique. Third, there aren't many studies that use globally accepted review frameworks, such as the OECD criteria, to examine school-based literacy programs. Addressing these gaps could help us learn more about literacy treatments and provide evidence to help learning recovery programs work better in the future.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employed a mixed-methods approach using an explanatory sequential design, in which quantitative data collection and analysis preceded qualitative inquiry. The quantitative phase assessed learners' reading proficiency before and after participation in the Catch-Up Fridays intervention. In contrast, the qualitative phase explored stakeholders' perspectives regarding the program's implementation using the OECD Evaluation Framework. Integrating both forms of evidence provided a more comprehensive understanding of learner outcomes and implementation experiences.

Research Setting and Participants. The study was conducted in three public secondary schools in **Carmen 3 District, Division of Bohol, Philippines**, during School Year 2024–2025. The quantitative participants consisted of **230 Grade 11 learners** selected through stratified random sampling from the academic and technical-vocational strands. The qualitative component involved **nine key informants**, comprising three school principals, three National Learning Camp (NLC) coordinators, and three English teachers who were directly involved in implementing the Catch-Up Fridays Program.

Research Instrument. Reading proficiency was assessed using an adapted reading assessment comprising three domains: **reading comprehension**, **vocabulary**, and **reading fluency**. Reading fluency was measured using the **Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM)** procedure based on an unpracticed reading passage. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent face validation by experts and pilot testing involving Grade 11 learners from a neighboring district. Internal consistency coefficients indicated acceptable reliability for both assessment sets (Cronbach's $\alpha = .755-.824$). Semi-structured interview guides were likewise developed to elicit stakeholders' experiences regarding the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the Catch-Up Fridays Program.

Data Collection. After obtaining permission from the school and administration, baseline reading tests were administered to the students who would be involved. After that, the Catch-Up Fridays action was implemented over the course of two weeks. Learners took the post-test using the same assessment method after the training was over. Then, qualitative interviews were conducted with English teachers, school officials, and organizers to gather more information about how the program was being implemented. With the subjects' permission, all talks were recorded on audio and then transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis. Learners' reading skills were summarized using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined differences across reading areas, and paired-samples t-tests identified differences between pre-test and post-test results. $\alpha = .05$ was set as the level of statistical significance. The six OECD assessment factors were used to organize the emerging themes from the qualitative data. These are relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. During analysis, both quantitative and qualitative results were used together to give a full picture of the intervention.

Ethical Considerations. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Bohol Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Permission was likewise secured from the Schools Division Office and participating school administrators. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent (and assent for learners) was obtained before data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and all data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. *Reading Proficiency Before and After the Catch-Up Fridays Intervention*

Domain	Pre-test Mean	Interpretation	Post-test Mean	Interpretation	Mean Gain
Reading Comprehension	19.55	Proficient	25.52	Highly Proficient	5.97
Vocabulary	16.82	Proficient	23.91	Highly Proficient	7.09
Reading Fluency (WCPM)	128.80	Less Proficient	141.10	Proficient	12.29

Note. $N = 230$. Reading fluency is measured using Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM).

In general, the reading skills of the kids who participated in the Catch-Up Fridays activity improved. Words learned and reading comprehension went from "Proficient" to "Highly Proficient." Reading speed went from "Less Proficient" to "Proficient." Different groups of students made different amounts of progress, but the steady rise in scores shows that planned literacy

activities may have helped these students read better.

The most noticeable change was in reading speed, which is good news because faster reading helps the brain process text more quickly and lets students focus more on understanding (Kim, 2020). Similarly, teaching specific words and reading real-life texts repeatedly have been linked to better reading comprehension and academic success (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Based on these results, it seems that incorporating long-term literacy tasks into regular school activities might be an effective way for senior high school students to improve their basic reading skills.

Table 2. *Differences Between Pre-test and Post-test Scores*

Reading Domain	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Decision
Comprehension	-26.64	229	< .001	Significant
Vocabulary	-21.54	229	< .001	Significant
Reading Fluency	23.58	229	< .001	Significant

Note. Paired-samples *t*-test, $\alpha = .05$.

Statistically significant improvements were observed across all three reading domains following the intervention. The findings indicate that learners’ post-test scores were consistently higher than their baseline performance. While the present study cannot attribute these improvements exclusively to the intervention because of the absence of a comparison group, the results nevertheless suggest that participation in structured literacy activities coincided with measurable gains in reading proficiency.

Previous research on literacy has found similar gains after structured reading interventions, especially when repeated reading, explicit vocabulary instruction, and scaffolded comprehension activities were used in the classroom (Cervetti et al., 2020; Kim, 2020).

Table 3. *Summary of Variance Across Reading Domains*

Analysis	F	<i>p</i>	Interpretation
Pre-test	Significant	< .001	Groups differed
Post-test	Significant	< .001	Groups differed
Mean Gain	Significant	< .001	Improvement differed across domains

The analysis of variance revealed statistically significant differences in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency between the pre-test and post-test assessments. Significant variation was likewise observed in learners’ mean gains, indicating that improvements were not uniform across reading domains. These findings are not unexpected, as reading proficiency is a multidimensional construct comprising related yet distinct cognitive and linguistic processes. Consequently, instructional interventions may influence each component differently depending on learners’ existing competencies and

instructional experiences.

CONCLUSION

The results show that the Catch-Up Fridays Program provided Grade 11 students with valuable opportunities to improve their reading skills. As teens read more, their language, reading comprehension, and reading speed improved. This suggests that organized literacy tasks, done regularly, may help them develop important reading skills. Even though the study's design does not allow for clear causal findings, the positive changes observed after the intervention are promising signs that focused reading programs in regular school settings might help.

The qualitative findings further indicate that school leaders and teachers generally perceived the program as relevant and aligned with learners' literacy needs. Participants agreed that it was useful for getting people interested in reading and helping them get back on track with their studies. They also raised realistic concerns about teaching materials, the time required to implement them, ways to monitor them, and their long-term viability.

These insights highlight the importance of maintaining collaborative implementation and continuous program refinement.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings suggest that effective literacy improvement extends beyond classroom instruction alone. Sustained institutional support, teacher capacity building, stakeholder collaboration, and regular monitoring appear to be important elements in strengthening the implementation of school-based literacy initiatives. The study contributes context-specific evidence that may inform future literacy policies and instructional practices for senior high school learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After reviewing the findings, some suggestions are kindly offered. Schools could keep the Catch-Up Fridays Program going and make it even better by giving kids a variety of age-appropriate reading tools, structured tracking systems, and chances to learn how to read in ways that are right for them. Continuous professional development may also help teachers use data-based literacy techniques that meet the different reading needs of their students.

To help students learn to read and write outside of school, school managers and education leaders might think about strengthening relationships with parents, local government units, and community groups. Regular evaluations of program implementation, using feedback from both learners and stakeholders, may also support continuous growth and informed decision-making. Future researchers are invited to examine the long-term benefits of the Catch-Up Fridays Program using larger, more diverse groups in longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs. More research could examine what motivates students

to read, how they use technology, the role of family support, and other factors that might affect their reading growth. These kinds of studies could add to the body of evidence supporting programs that help people learn to read and write again, and could also help improve reading instruction in secondary schools.

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