

Effectiveness Of Project Drop Everything And Read (Dear) In Improving Learners' Reading Performance: A Basis For An Enhancement Plan

Marie Cris A. Alan¹

1 – University of Cagayan Valley

orlistyalan2019@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study determined the effectiveness of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) in improving the reading comprehension of Grade 6 learners at Tuguegarao North Central School during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it examined the learners' reading comprehension levels before and after the implementation of the program, determined the significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, measured the effect size of the intervention, identified the enablers and challenges encountered in the implementation of DEAR, and proposed an enhancement plan based on the findings.

Using a mixed-method research design, the study involved 259 Grade 6 learner-respondents, five English teachers, one English coordinator, and one school principal. Data were gathered using the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) pretest and posttest scores, as well as Focus Group Discussion (FGD) questionnaires. Statistical tools such as mean, Wilcoxon signed-rank test, and effect size analysis were utilized to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative responses.

Findings revealed that before the implementation of Project DEAR, most learners were at the instructional level, indicating that they still required teacher guidance and support in reading comprehension. After the implementation, the majority of learners progressed to the independent level, demonstrating improved comprehension skills and greater reading independence. Results further showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, confirming that the DEAR program significantly improved learners' reading comprehension. Moreover, the computed effect size indicated a large positive effect of the intervention, suggesting that the program had a substantial impact on learners' reading performance.

The study also identified several enablers in the implementation of Project DEAR, including the development of reading skills and comprehension, promotion of reading culture, vocabulary enhancement, and increased learner engagement and motivation. However, challenges such as lack of learner interest, time constraints, scheduling conflicts, and limited reading materials were also encountered during the implementation.



The study concluded that Project DEAR is an effective intervention in improving learners' reading comprehension and fostering positive reading habits among Grade 6 learners. Hence, the implementation of the proposed READ-UP Program (Reading Enhancement and Development for Unified Progress) is strongly recommended to strengthen the sustainability and effectiveness of the DEAR program by addressing the identified challenges and maximizing the program's enablers.

Keywords: *Project DEAR, Reading Comprehension, Reading Performance, Phil-IRI, Reading Intervention, Grade 6 Learners*



Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, innovative teaching strategies and supplementary programs had become increasingly vital for enhancing student learning outcomes on a global scale. As the world became more interconnected, the ability to read, comprehend, and critically engage with texts was recognized as a foundational skill for academic achievement, lifelong learning, and active participation in society. International organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD emphasized that reading literacy was not only a key driver of individual empowerment and social inclusion but also a crucial factor in economic development and global competitiveness. Despite significant progress, global literacy challenges persisted, with UNESCO reporting that as of 2023, approximately 773 million adults worldwide still lacked basic literacy skills, two-thirds of whom were women (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023). These disparities were particularly pronounced in low-income countries and marginalized communities, as evidence showed that in many low- and middle-income countries, over 50–70% of children, especially those from the poorest households, were unable to meet minimum reading proficiency standards (UNICEF, UNESCO, & World Bank, 2022; UNESCO GEM Report 2020).

To address these challenges, countries around the world have adopted a range of evidence-based strategies, including structured reading programs, teacher professional development, and community-based literacy initiatives. Programs such as the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) initiative have been widely implemented in various educational systems, demonstrating positive impacts on students' reading habits, comprehension skills, and overall academic performance. Research indicates that structured, uninterrupted reading time—where students are encouraged to select their own reading materials—fosters motivation, autonomy, and a lifelong love for reading.

In the Philippine context, the importance of reading literacy was further magnified by the country's commitment to quality education and the development of globally competitive citizens. English, as a global lingua franca, played a pivotal role in academic and professional success, making English proficiency a critical educational skill. Recognizing persistent challenges such as declining literacy rates and reading comprehension difficulties among Filipino students, the Department of Education (DepEd) institutionalized national initiatives to strengthen reading and literacy skills. Every Child a Reader Program (ECARP), mandated by DepEd Order No. 45, s. 2002, aimed to ensure that every child became a proficient reader by the end of Grade 3 and continued to improve in later years. ECARP provided schools with systematic, research-based interventions, including remedial reading programs, assessment tools, and teacher training, to address literacy gaps and promote lifelong learning.

Complementing ECARP, DepEd Order No. 26, s. 2010 institutionalized the National Reading Month and Reading Awareness Initiatives, with the DEAR program as a flagship activity. The DEAR program encouraged all students, teachers, and school staff in both public and private schools to dedicate a specific time each day solely to reading. By fostering a culture of reading, DEAR aimed to cultivate a love for reading, improve comprehension skills, and promote literacy across all grade levels. The program's emphasis on student choice and teacher



modeling had been shown to enhance engagement and reading performance, aligning with both national and global literacy goals.

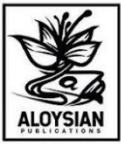
At the local level, these national directives were operationalized through school-based interventions tailored to the unique needs of learners. At Tuguegarao North Central School (TNCS) in Cagayan Valley, the DEAR program was introduced as a targeted response to observed challenges in reading performance among Grade 6 students. Teachers at TNCS identified issues such as lack of reading motivation, limited vocabulary, short attention spans, and minimal exposure to diverse reading materials. The DEAR program was designed to address these challenges by providing structured, uninterrupted reading time, allowing students to choose their own reading materials, and fostering a supportive reading environment through teacher participation and modeling.

Thus, this study sought to assess the effectiveness of the DEAR program in improving the reading performance of learners at TNCS. By employing a mixed-method research design and utilizing tools such as the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and FGD questionnaire, the research aimed to determine the program's impact on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and overall English proficiency. The findings were expected to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on educational innovations, offering practical implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers seeking to bridge learning gaps and foster a culture of literacy in the Philippines and beyond.

At the classroom level, the urgency of strengthening reading literacy became even more evident. During preliminary observations in Grade 6 classes at TNCS, the researcher noted recurring challenges such as learners' limited vocabulary, inconsistent comprehension skills, and difficulty sustaining focus during reading tasks. Many students expressed low motivation to read outside the classroom, often preferring digital entertainment over books, which further limited their exposure to meaningful texts. Informal discussions with teachers revealed similar concerns, emphasizing that despite the availability of English reading materials, learners showed little initiative to engage in independent reading.

As a classroom teacher and direct witness to these difficulties, the researcher had observed that students often struggled to articulate main ideas, make inferences, and apply critical thinking when responding to texts. This reading gap not only affected their performance in English but also hindered learning across other subject areas, where comprehension of written material was equally essential. Such observations underscored the pressing need for structured interventions that were both engaging and sustainable.

It was in this context that the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program was introduced at TNCS as a school-based intervention to address learners' difficulties in reading comprehension. The researcher's observations of learners' struggles in understanding texts, along with the teachers' shared concerns, served as a strong motivation for undertaking this study. By systematically analyzing pretest and posttest scores through documentary analysis and complementing these with qualitative insights from focus group discussions, this research aimed to determine the effectiveness of DEAR in improving learners' reading comprehension. It also



sought to identify the enablers and challenges of program implementation and, ultimately, to propose an evidence-based enhancement plan that responded to these findings.

Furthermore, this study contributed to the broader pursuit of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, particularly Target 4.6, which emphasized ensuring that by 2030, all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieved literacy and numeracy. By aligning local interventions such as DEAR with this global agenda, the research underscored the importance of sustainable literacy programs as essential building blocks toward achieving inclusive and equitable quality education. Ultimately, the intended output of this study was the development of an enhancement plan that strengthened program implementation, ensured sustainability, and maximized DEAR's effectiveness in improving learners' reading performance.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) in improving learners' reading comprehension at Tuguegarao North Central School for the school year 2025-2026, as a basis for an enhancement plan.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the mean score of the learners before the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read?
2. What is the mean score of the learners after the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read?
3. Is there a significant difference between the mean scores of the learners before and after the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read?
4. What is the effect size of the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read in improving learners' reading comprehension?
5. What are the enablers and challenges in the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read?
6. What enhancement plan can be proposed to address the enablers and challenges in the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read?

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Research Design

This study utilized a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the effectiveness of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program in improving learners' reading comprehension. The quantitative component involved documentary analysis of learners' pretest and posttest scores to measure their reading comprehension levels before and after the implementation of DEAR. The qualitative component

employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) questionnaires with teachers and administrators to explore the enablers and challenges of the program's implementation.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of the study were composed of both learners and school personnel who were directly involved in the Project DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) program at Tuguegarao North Central School for the school year 2025–2026.

To select the student respondents, total enumeration was used, while the stratified-random sampling technique was used in selecting the teacher respondents.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents

Participants	Number of Respondents
Grade 6 Learners	259
English Teachers	5
English Coordinator	1
School Principal	1
Total	266

Data Gathering Tool

The researcher used the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (PHIL-IRI) assessment tool to assess the reading comprehension of Grade 6 learners. This instrument provided the pretest and posttest scores, which served as the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the DEAR program. The PHIL-IRI focused on comprehension and word recognition, making it suitable for the objectives of this study. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) questionnaires guide was also used to assess the teacher-participants' perspectives on the strengths, challenges, and potential improvements of the DEAR program, as adopted in the study of Ibojo (2024) titled 'Drop Everything and Read: An Inquiry into the Experiences of Reading Implementers.' This was used to gather insights from the Grade 6 English teachers, the English coordinator, and the school principal to provide detailed feedback regarding program facilitation, monitoring, and alignment with school goals.



Data Gathering Procedure

To gather all the data needed in the study, the researcher prepared a letter addressed to the University President, through the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), seeking permission to gather the data required for the study. Once approval was granted and the ethical clearance was issued, the researcher proceeded with data gathering. The researcher also sought permission from the School Division Superintendent, the school principal, and relevant school authorities to conduct the study. Parental consent was also secured from guardians to ensure ethical considerations.

To gather the data needed for the student-respondent pretest and posttest, reading assessments were utilized.

For the teacher-respondents, FGD-based questionnaires were also utilized for the English teachers, the English coordinator, and the school principal, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was employed because the data gathered underwent data familiarization, wherein the researcher carefully read and re-read all the responses to gain an overall understanding of participants' perspectives on the DEAR program.

After the data collection, the data gathered were organized, tabulated, and interpreted.

Statistical Tools

The following statistical tools were utilized in the analysis of the data that were gathered:

Mean was utilized to assess the mean score of the learners before and after the implementation of DEAR.

T-test was used to test the significant difference between the mean scores of the learners before and after the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read.

Moreover, Pearson-r was also used to assess the effect size of the implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read in improving learners' reading comprehension.

The interpretation of scores of the student-respondents followed the scale below, which was anchored on a 32-item comprehension test:

Numerical Value	Score Range	Descriptive Interpretation
3	26-32	Independent
2	19-25	Instructional
1	0-18	Frustration



For the data gathered from focus group discussion questionnaires with teachers, the coordinator, and the school head, thematic analysis was employed as it allowed the identification, analysis, and familiarization of recurring themes. This enabled learners' engagement, teacher support, and administrative backing, highlighting factors that contributed to the success of the program and addressed the enhancement plan, providing a comprehensive means of examining the effectiveness of the DEAR program as an intervention in improving learners' reading comprehension.

Summary of Findings

1. Level of Learner's Reading Comprehension Before the Implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)
 - The pretest results revealed that most learners were at the instructional level, indicating a moderate level of reading comprehension that required teacher guidance and support.
2. Level of Learner's Reading Comprehension After the Implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)
 - The posttest results showed that most learners progressed to the independent level, reflecting an improvement in their reading comprehension after the implementation of the program.
3. Difference in Learner's Reading Comprehension Before and After the Implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)
 - There was a significant improvement in the reading comprehension of learners after the implementation of the program.
4. Effect of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) on Learners' Reading Comprehension
 - The findings indicate that the program had a strong positive effect on improving learners' reading comprehension.
5. Enablers and Challenges in the Implementation of Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)

The implementation of the program was supported by several enablers, including the development of reading skills, promotion of reading culture, vocabulary enhancement, and increased student engagement. However, challenges such as lack of learner interest, time constraints, limited resources, and scheduling issues were also encountered. Despite these challenges, the program was found to be effective when implemented consistently with the support of stakeholders.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, Project Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) effectively improved learners' reading comprehension, as evidenced by their progression from instructional to independent reading levels and the significant difference in their performance before and after the intervention. The program demonstrated a strong positive impact on learners' reading development. Its success was supported by factors such as enhanced reading skills, increased engagement, and promotion of a reading culture, although challenges related to time, resources, and learner motivation were also encountered.



Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools are encouraged to continuously implement DEAR as a regular reading program to further strengthen learners' comprehension skills.
2. Teachers may provide differentiated instruction, remediation sessions, and guided reading activities for learners who remain at instructional and frustration levels.
3. School administrators may allocate funds and resources for reading materials, including printed and digital texts, to support the DEAR program.
4. Regular training and Learning Action Cell sessions may be conducted to equip teachers with effective reading strategies and intervention techniques.
5. Parents and community stakeholders may be actively involved in reading programs to strengthen home-based reading support.
6. Schools may institutionalize a fixed daily reading schedule to ensure consistency in DEAR implementation.
7. The proposed enhancement plan (READ-UP Program) may be implemented and monitored to systematically address the identified challenges, particularly in terms of learner motivation, resource availability, and program sustainability.
8. Future studies may explore the long-term effects of DEAR and compare it with other reading interventions across different grade levels.

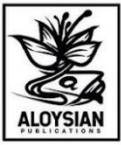
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