



Research Article

Experiences and Challenges of Selected Grade 7 Students on the Implementation of Free-Structured Wednesdays

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ABSTRACT

This action research paper aims to explore the perception of Grade 7 students in accomplishing their academic tasks and CAPSTONE Initiatives with the use of free-structured Wednesday. Likewise, it aims to highlight and expound on the advantages of free-structured Wednesdays in engaging students to do their assigned tasks. In addition, the challenges encountered by the participants were addressed to improve the school's strategic direction on social innovation in education. Focus group discussion was used in this study to explore the challenges and experiences of eleven Grade 7 students on implementing free-structured Wednesdays. The researcher followed the steps suggested by the University of Limpopo & VLIR project South Africa for conducting focus group discussions and a coding technique to analyze the data. Since the free-structured Wednesdays is a new scheme included in the academic time frame of the school, a set of clearer guidelines that could help the junior high school students smooth the transition to this set-up must be considered.

INTRODUCTION

In a learning environment, time is valuable for teachers and students. There are instances when teachers would claim that they have insufficient time to address every student's learning need, especially the ones who are underachievers. Since classroom tasks are essential to the student's learning process, teachers who manage a well-organized classroom make the best use of student learning time. Providing "free time" during the school day allows the students to improve effective actions (Meador, 2017). With this, students manage their learning by being accountable to it.

De La Salle Lipa's Strategic Direction on Social Innovation in Education, Synergized, Mobile, Inte-

grated Learning Experience towards Self-Directed education (SMILES), was theorized to be the platform for the enhanced learning engagement that promotes innovation, collaboration, creativity, and well-being among the learners in a networked learning environment. Correspondingly, it provides meaningful and relevant learning experiences directed towards developing the CAPSTONE (Community-based Action Project with Strategically Themed Objectives through Networked Environment) Initiatives. In line with this, De La Salle Lipa offers free-structured Wednesdays for the students to maximize their learning time. Each student must use the time to accomplish the CAPSTONE Initiatives project. Some schools, corporations, or organizations use the term "free-structured



Wednesday” to describe a Wednesday schedule that is more flexible and self-directed. Instead of following the typical structure of classes, meetings, or assignments, participants are free to focus their time on activities that interest them or that they believe are most important. This could include self-study, creative endeavors, team collaborations, and professional development. The idea is to promote freedom, creativity, and well-being by disrupting the tight schedule of a regular week on a Wednesday. Each institution or company may execute it differently, depending on their specific needs and aims. Though there are issues and concerns regarding the implementation of the new scheme, such as the time is taken for granted, there is still a need to uncover the purpose it serves. This action research paper aims to explore the perception of Grade 7 students in accomplishing their academic tasks and CAPSTONE Initiatives using free-structured Wednesdays. The purpose of this study is to highlight and expound on the advantages of free-structured Wednesdays in engaging students to do their assigned tasks. In addition, the challenges encountered by the participants will be addressed to improve the school’s strategic direction on social innovation in education. Furthermore, this will serve as a tool for the administrators in the academe to make the free-structured Wednesday more relevant and meaningful for 21st-century learners. Thus, new guidelines may be arrived at. Specifically, this action research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of selected Grade 7 students on implementing free-structured Wednesdays?
2. What are the challenges faced by the select-

ed Grade 7 students on implementing of free-structured Wednesdays?

With this study, the school administrators will acquire additional relevant information and create new provisions for properly implementing free-structured Wednesdays. Interpersonal and communication skills must be used to work with other staff members, teachers, students, and parents. In addition, they will realize that it is important to create an “Evaluation Committee” to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of the program. Data describing current challenges regarding the implementation of free-structured Wednesday should be shared and gathered with stakeholders. As stakeholders are also involved in discovering possible practices and developments to fit with the expected outcomes of the schools’ strategic directions, they should create a mutual understanding of the existing condition to the desired changes in school outcomes. Likewise, teachers and students will be more aware that they should take the implementation of free-structured Wednesday as an advantage on how they can improve the quality of education. They will also be enlightened to the importance of the integration of technology. On the other hand, parents will have more reasons to support the school in all its endeavors. Thus, educational institutions that want to embrace 21st-century approach to learning will have a deeper understanding of the importance of having a free-structured Wednesday. Through this study, they can analyze, review, and eventually adapt the program in their respective school as part of innovation in education.



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the Philippine context, education is regarded as the main path to economic and social progress. Under the colonial rule of the United States in the country, Filipinos adopted the ideal democratic society of the Americans, wherein people can thrive in life with a good education (Florido, 2006). For this reason, education is believed to be indispensable and a national legacy that should be passed from one generation to the next.

The educational system provides greater free time among children in most countries today. Moreover, several studies worldwide have proven that the best way to promote learning is through play. The academic performance of Finland's students ranks among the highest in the world due to the emphasis of play in their educational institutions. Instead of just sitting on their chairs while studying lessons, students in the lower level allot seventy-five minutes of break time per school day. On the other hand, an ordinary Filipino school would offer two scheduled break time which are known as "recess" and "lunch" with a total of one hour to one and a half hours, wherein much of this time is spent in eating. If a child finishes his break or lunch quicker than expected, then he will have more "play time". Other children play after classes while waiting to be fetched by their parents. Not all schools offer free time, and if there are, unstructured time is not offered daily. Though there are some children who play during their P.E. classes, the time is still insufficient for socialization purposes. (Smart Parenting, 2015). According to Kieffer (2014), free time is a good thing and beneficial for children. In this context,

parents should encourage their children to participate in the recreational and extracurricular activities during the academic year. Besides, it is not an issue to let the child participate in various school activities if it can help them discover their interests and talents; however, scheduling them with several activities may lead them to get overstretched. Too many tasks bestowed upon children may affect their view of learning. For this reason, it is important for parents to be vigilant on how to maximize their child's free time. Thus, parents and teachers must work hand in hand to emphasize the amazing benefits of free time in children's education.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2015) emphasized that free time is one fascinating aspect of Finnish education. Children in Finland are given more time to play outside and interact with others. Additionally, Finnish students spend relatively less time doing their assignments. Based on the study by OECD 2014, Finnish students aged 15 years old spend 2.8 hours a week on homework, and this contrasts with the 6.1 hours American students spend per week. It is clearly noticed that Finns value both free time and play. Following the law, teachers must provide a 15-minute break for every 45 minutes of discussion, unlike in the United States where students get thirty minutes of recess every day. Furthermore, this "lack of free play" for American students may result in other mental health issues like being worried, anxious, and depressed.

In the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Finnish ranking has dropped (Heim, 2016) but the country is still among the top performers. For years, the Finnish education system



is an envy despite the lower public spending on education compared to countries like the U.S, and the U.K. among others (OECD, 2017). Finnish children attend some non-compulsory pre-primary education before proceeding to the compulsory nine-year basic education. Higher secondary education is divided into two separate systems, higher secondary schools that are academically oriented and vocational institutions that prepare students for further education in the universities and direct employment. Moreover, students from these different strands may still proceed to tertiary education through study-program specific entrance examinations. Entrance to higher secondary is based on a school certificate and application with special requirements for some programs. It is clearly understood that free time is greatly treasured by students, teachers, and parents in Finland because it is crucial for development. This explains that children are allowed 15 minutes of playtime after 45 minutes of teaching to learn how to collaborate with others and develop social skills. Meanwhile, American students must wade through hours of doing homework each night. On the other hand, Finnish students complete all the necessary school tasks during school hours, allowing them to have free play with their friends and family in the evenings. This viewpoint recognizes childhood should be more than just remembering facts and information but learning life skills that will help them thrive in the present era. With this, trust is an essential key to the whole structure, so instead of being doubtful in every aspect related to the implementation of free time.

Recent studies have demonstrated that unstructured time proves significant advantages to student's

academic achievement. First, learners are free from desired expectations and outcomes. With the use of unstructured time, they are indulged to develop their interests and learn on their own which creates a more meaningful learning environment for them. In return, students become independent, creative, productive, and socially responsible thinkers who can take an action based on their beliefs. To set and reach goals independently, students need to enhance their self-directed executive function. Barker & Munakata (2015) state that executive function is very important because it helps children in all aspects of their daily lives, most especially in managing their feelings and emotions. In addition, executive function during childhood predicts significant outcomes years and even decades later in terms of one's academic performance, health, wellness, and delinquency. Based on what the researcher observed, this is one of the first studies to grasp the question of how scheduled formal activities may affect children's neural pathways. It is good to note also that the findings presented that the more unstructured time spent by children can result in an improved self-directed executive function. Indeed, unstructured time has an impact on one's self-directed executive function.

Free play can promote executive functioning into a higher-level skill that integrates attention and other cognitive functions such as organizing, planning, problem-solving and decision-making. Furthermore, free play also boosts children's social skills as they learn to communicate, negotiate, and collaborate with others. This type of social learning contributes to the developing awareness and self-regulation among children. Lastly, Burdette and Whittaker emphasized that



free play may improve children's emotional state by minimizing sleep problems, aggression, anxiety, and depression. Experts also agree that unstructured time is essential and necessary. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) described that a hassled daily routine combined with extensive academic tasks could be the leading cause of pressure among children. Ginsburg (2007) note that there should be a balance in academics and life skills needed to be developed among children. This report emphasizes that students' success happens as the result of role modeling, guidance and parental love rather than academic or extra-curricular activities being the stimulus for developing those qualities that help prepare children for success in life. Moreover, improving students' relationships with teachers has positive, significant, and lifelong implications for students' academic and social development. Improving students' relationships with their teachers will not generate gains in accomplishment but, those students who have positive and supportive relationships with their teachers will achieve higher levels of accomplishment than those students with more relationship issues.

Certain learning opportunities are gained by using free time. John Paul II mentioned that it is imperative to take advantage of free time spent by young children and adults. Spending time with friends or family members is the best way to have a fun and meaningful weekend. This is also the time when people see themselves as the front-runner in their own lives because they can do whatever they want. They can make their own decisions by arranging their personal interests and asking questions like "What do I want to do?", "Which task I should I prioritize?" and "Which

among these tasks can be done later?". People learn to manage time, prioritize things, understand their selves better, discover new possibilities and become more responsible, for their actions. Children who have less structured and controlled time are the ones who achieve their own goals better (Barker & Munakata, 2015). For instance, children who spend more time in less structured activities like reading books, visiting the zoo, and playing with others are the ones who can establish their own goals and take action than those children who participate in more structured activities which include attending classes or tutorial sessions, playing soccer practice and doing assignments had a poorer self-directed executive function which measures the ability to establish and achieve goals in an independent manner. Furthermore, children's abilities to attain goals are supported by improving executive functions and cognitive processes. Hence, efforts to develop children's executive functions have improved their externally-driven executive functioning which predicts important life outcomes (Barker & Munakata, 2015).

Unstructured time and free time make people relaxed and contented. Several studies show that people are usually better off during holidays or weekends (O'Donnell, 2018). These days or what we call, "weekends", people can choose their own activities, spend spare time with their loved ones and detach themselves from weekday responsibilities especially in work-related matters. In addition, everyone needs time to daydream and one can only daydream during free time. Children should daydream to visualize possible futures for themselves and consider all the opportunities in front of them (O'Donnell, 2018). In



In addition, it was mentioned in the study that children should be allowed to daydream but, of course, not during classroom discussions. While play is important for preschoolers and toddlers, daydreaming is important to young adolescents. The problem is daydreaming among children is often neglected and criticized but children should daydream during their leisure time. Students cannot daydream if they do not have the leisure time to do so. Allowing students the time to visualize what will happen to their future is something that teachers must offer to them and can be done if they are relaxed and at ease. With this, teachers might be surprised at the results.

Learner-centered approaches must be practiced in the twenty-first century learning. In a student-centered classroom, students are part of a holistic environment that capitalizes on student interests because the primary goal of student-centered classrooms is to help students become self-regulating learners. Students are encouraged to reflect on learning, share their insights with others, and apply new learning to authentic experiences. When learners are focused, they become fully engaged in the process. More so, teachers in a student-centered classroom, facilitate learning opportunities for students to develop metacognitive processes. Teachers should ensure that learning will be a self-regulated, ongoing process of making sense of the world through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection.

Finally, students need to be inspired and challenged in their learning (Crocket, 2016). Successful learners can reflect on their thinking and learning, set reasonable learning or performance goals, select po-

tentially appropriate learning strategies or methods, and monitor their progress toward these goals. If a student encounters a problem or does not timely developed toward a goal, successful learners know what to do. As society advances, they should learn to collaborate and work with their peers because complex problems that we cannot even conceive right now will be everywhere. That is why students must be able to create effective solutions to real-world problems. They need the ability to think critically, which includes proficiency to compare, contrast, evaluate, synthesize and apply without being monitored or guided (Crocket, 2016). Moreover, they must learn how to work effectively with others, solve their problems, stay on task, and keep on trying even when they get discouraged to become good communicators and problem-solvers. Velasco (2015) encourages children to become lifelong learners with the help of parents and teachers. Educating children to become a lifelong learner is one of the best gifts teachers and parents can impart to them because children must not only be equipped with knowledge and information but most importantly with skills needed to thrive in life. Life skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, innovative decision making, negotiation and building relationships are essential to thrive in life. Thus, students should foster grit and volition to learn independently and obtain life skills.

Throughout history, effective and efficient time management has been emphasized as a cornerstone to success (Pugh & Nathwani, 2017; Nasrullah & Khan, 2015). In this competitive environment, social institutions place a premium on time management solutions to achieve peak performance. It is also recommended



that students begin practicing time management from an early age (Valle et al., 2016). Indeed, these findings suggest that giving unstructured time to the students can offer important cognitive and emotional advantages at the same time. De La Salle Lipa takes higher hopes that learning should not only be confined to four corners of the classroom instead teachers as the second parents must prioritize the value of learning among students even at home. Thus, students need to be self-regulated in their own learning processes not only inside the classroom but wherever they are. They must acquire “inner discipline” to earn trust, assume responsibility, and acquire power to make decisions that will develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

More self-directed opportunities are acquired through less structured activities. From this standpoint, structured time could lessen the development of self-directed control since adults in such scenarios can provide external prompts and indications of what could happen. One of the important benefits of unstructured time is that it can provide independence, which is the foundation for motivation, creativity, and action (Barker & Munakata, 2015). To facilitate conceptual understanding, flexible problem-solving, personal adjustment, and social responsibility, valuing student autonomy in educational contexts is necessary. In the concept of managing unstructured time by Alyami, et. al. (2021), students must develop an interest in learning, value education, and have confidence in their attributes and capacities. Children exercising their executive functions, specifically the cognitive

control processes, can help them regulate thoughts and actions to support goal-directed behavior. They also acquire several higher-level cognitive processes, including planning and decision-making, maintenance and manipulation of information in memory, inhibition of unwanted thoughts, feelings, and actions, and flexible shifting from one task to another. With this, students will become more responsible and accountable in their learning.

In the 21st century, students’ success requires knowing how to learn. In addition, today’s students will be expected to have several professional careers in their lifetime. As society becomes complex and changes, students must develop strong critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills to succeed. Since the institution aims for innovation in education, a digital campus will be of great help because, in this setting, teachers can take advantage of using technology to create an engaging and personalized environment and meet the evolving educational needs of the 21st-century learners. Learning does not have to be a one-size-fits-all or confined to the four walls of the classroom. Thus, the opportunities influenced by technology should be used to revisit 21st-century education and prepare students to be learners for life.

Providing learning opportunities such as using the free-structured Wednesday among students will help them reflect and create an environment where they can take full responsibility for their learning and become more of a partner with their teacher to engage in a meaningful learning experience. Having the free-structured Wednesday create a positive classroom climate, allowing students the time to associate their



gained knowledge and skills with their own experiences. Therefore, this theoretical framework promotes communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking as students use free-structured Wednesday to drive their self-directed executive functioning and reach their goals.

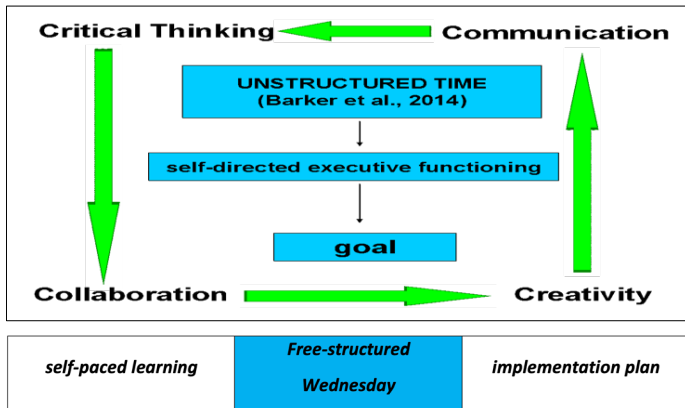


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

As a member of a learning community, each student is entitled to interact with others in various ways, be it in at home or in school. For this reason, implementing the free structure every Wednesday is a great help for our students because different learning opportunities like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity will be developed among them. Experts believe that to empower formal and informal learning among students, 21st-century learning skills must occur in situations that foster interaction and a sense of community.

Globally speaking, people are living in a complex society wherein they are exposed to digitization and technological innovations. 21st-century learning gives an opportunity to integrate knowledge and skills into a framework that repulses these contradictions. Furthermore, twenty-first-century learning can be one's

foundation to explore what the future holds because integrating this learning model entails such modification in which students take risks, promote learning dispositions, build a culture of trust and create rational decisions. Standards in education are changing not only in the manner which students learn in the classroom but most importantly in how students' knowledge and skills will be evaluated. Thus, it is essential for students to enhance the 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking by developing concrete and clearer guidelines on the free-structured Wednesdays implementation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research method, focus group discussion, to explore the challenges and experiences of selected Grade 7 students in implementing free-structured Wednesday.

Data Gathering Procedures

In gathering data, the researcher followed the steps suggested by the University of Limpopo & VLIR project South Africa which is a step-by-step guide for conducting focus group discussions.

Step 1. Plan the study.

This paper is qualitative in nature as the analysis would be based on the researchers' questionnaire that was supported by an in-depth focus group discussion with the participants. In selecting the participants of



this study, the researcher asked the permission of the following persons: the Integrated School Principal, Assistant Principal for the Grade 7 Administration and Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction, the Grade 7 Moderator, and the participant's parents/guardians. Parents/guardians of the participants were informed about the conduct of the action research through the consent form was given to them.

The step-by-step guide for conducting a focus group discussion by the University of Limpopo and VLIR project South Africa was also followed in formulating the questions since all the questions are open-ended, beginning with “how,” “what,” or “why,” and avoid any topics that might trigger a conflict between the facilitator and the participants.

In addition, the following ground rules were evident during the conduct of the focus group discussion: (1) only one person speaks at a time; (2) everyone was given an equal chance to participate in the discussion; (3) respected the opinions of other participant by listening attentively; and (4) keeping the privacy of participants in the group by not sharing what has been discussed outside of the focus group.

Step 2. Choose the location and format for the focus group discussion

Face-to-face focus group discussion was done in Learning Resource Center in the Junior High School located on the first floor of the Hall of Lasallian Saints (HLS) Building. The Conference room was chosen because it is well – ventilated and pieces of multimedia equipment are suitable for audio recording.

Having a well-ventilated room greatly helped the facilitator, researcher, and participants to be more comfortable with each other which created a more productive workplace.

Step 3. Recruit participants

A letter regarding the conduct of the action research was given to the Integrated School Principal, Assistant Principal for Administration, Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction, and Grade 7 Moderator. Participants were randomly selected with the help of the Grade 7 Moderator. Moreover, there were fifteen Grade 7 participants selected from the sixteen sections in the year level, school year 2017-2018. The researcher went to the classroom of each participant and gave a short orientation on the conduct of the research. Letters to parents were also given to each participant on the same day. A reply slip allowing the participants to join the focus group discussion was returned to the researcher since all the participants' age were below 18 years of age. Participants were also oriented on the purpose of the study and asked to fill out a “Consent to Audio and Video Recording and Transcription” Form.

To ensure enough participants will attend the focus group discussion, the following conditions were considered: (1) the focus group discussion was scheduled after the 2nd Quarterly Assessment dated December 14, which is the last day of the quarter before the start of the semestral break; (2) discussion was done in an air-conditioned room to make them comfortable; (3) multimedia equipment were available for audio – recording, and (4) heavy snacks were served after the



discussion as a token of appreciation.

Step 4. Develop a facilitator's guide

The researcher created a facilitator's guide containing questions that revolves around the challenges and experiences encountered by selected grade 7 students regarding the implementation of free-structured Wednesday. The following guidelines were created to help the facilitator solicit information needed to maximize the time allotted for the discussion: abstract of the study and list of the questions that will address the experiences and challenges encountered by selected Grade 7 students regarding the implementation of free-structured Wednesday. Moreover, the facilitator maintained a warm and friendly attitude, could establish eye contact with participants, and did not judge participants' responses.

Step 5. Conduct of the focus group discussion

Before the conduct of the focus group discussion, the researcher, a full-time female faculty member of the Social Science Department of the Junior High School, De La Salle Lipa welcomed the participants and gave an orientation on the process and conduct of the focus group discussion. Participants were given enough time to share their experiences and the researcher emphasized among the participants that there were no wrong or correct answers. In addition, it was also requested that each participant speak clearly so that answers would be recorded properly. She also reassured the participants that all answers would be treated with utmost confidentiality. The Grade 7 Moderator was the one who asked the FGD questions which are all about the implementation of

free-structured Wednesday. During the discussion, the moderator encouraged everyone to share their experiences; most of the time, participants agreed. For all the participants to express their thoughts and experiences, the moderator sought everyone's opinion so no one would dominate the discussion. It can also be observed also that the researcher took full responsibility for the audio-recording, and note-taking. The session ended with a closing statement of gratitude from the Grade 7 Moderator and researcher for the active participation of selected Grade 7 students.

Data Analysis

The researcher did the verbatim or word-for-word transcription of the focus group discussion after audio-recording to become immersed in the data for analysis and interpretation. Verbatim transcription is extremely important (Corners, 2015). It is important to accurately transcribe the participant's words to avoid misunderstandings and inconsistencies. Likewise, an incorrect transcription can change the meaning of the statement.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Significant ethical considerations were taken in the conduct of the action research. The researcher asked for approval from the school's authority such as the Integrated School Principal, Assistant Principal for Administration, and Assistant Principal for Curriculum and Instruction. Since the participants are minors, the researcher also sought the parental consent from their parents and guardians. A letter was given to the participants and their parents, orienting them



and informing them about the conduct of the action research. Participants will only be allowed to partake in the study with their parents' approval. The letter contains that participants are allowed to withdraw from research at any time, preventing any form of threat such as physical, emotional, and psychological distress, not forcing them to change their moral values and decision-making for the purpose of research and treating their responses with utmost confidentiality. Another orientation was given before the start of the scheduled focus group discussion, and all guidelines were reviewed once again to verify if all participants agreed to be part of the study. The FGD facilitator guided the participants to answer questions, produce a piece of valuable information and provide security among the participants. The participants' responses were not judged and treated with respect. Since the researcher served as the transcriber, a private and quiet discussion room free from any distractions was used as a place wherein participants felt comfortable and at ease.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

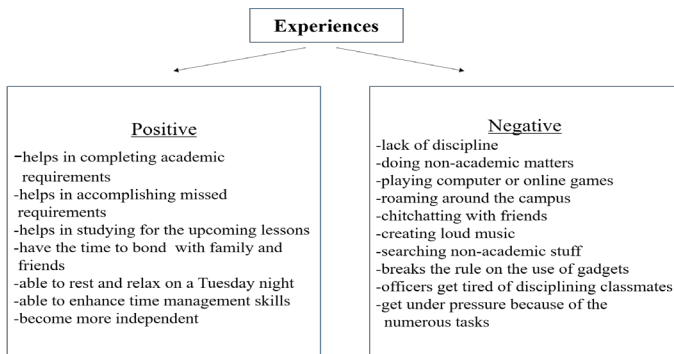


Figure 2. Students' experiences on Free-Structured Wednesday

Figure 1 shows the participants' experiences on Free-structured Wednesday divided into positive and negative effects. For the positive effects, most of

the participants mentioned that the Free-structured Wednesday helps them in completing their academic and missed requirements, helps in studying for the upcoming lessons, helps them have the time to bond with family and friends, helps them to rest and relax on a Tuesday night, helps them to enhance management skills and helps them to become more independent as Student 1 shared that,

“My positive feedback for this free-structured Wednesday is that it makes us students, more independent and it helps us to manage our time wisely so that we can fit all the things that we need to do, our lessons, time, studying at home.”

With free-structured Wednesday, students are free from expectations and imposed structure. Through unstructured time, they are free to follow their own interests, learn on their own, and eventually create a learning experience that is more meaningful to them. It turns out that this is one of the best ways to foster independent, creative, and socially connected thinkers who are equipped to perform based on their perspectives and beliefs (McMillan, 2013). This is evident when Student 2 stated that,

“On the positive side, I had enough time to relax and finish everything needed to be done and bond with my friends for longer time compared to regular school days.”

Having a free-structured Wednesday opens up time for students to do their academic tasks such as Capstone, assignments, projects, and group collaboration activities because a seven-hour school day can be



overwhelming for many students, and by cutting back a day particularly on Wednesday, students can reduce stress levels and increase time for the accomplishment of their assigned tasks. It was also mentioned by Student 3 when he said that,

“One of the positive feedbacks I had on the free-structured Wednesday is that this structure enabled us to use our time to complete our unfinished tasks that our teachers give us. Also, this also enhance our capability to use our time wisely.”

Based on the participants’ responses, free-structured Wednesday allows the students to accomplish their academic tasks such as Capstone. This time is necessary and essential to children’s development because they need to detach their selves from the usual routine classroom activities and give them the time to do what they like. Students need that time to enjoy, relax, and feel good about themselves and it could be anything like reading, listening to music, painting, or even chatting with their friends. It is good to note that during the focus group discussion, Student 4 emphasized that,

“...the free-structured Wednesday is not all about academics but it enhances my skills through teamwork and group collaboration.”

This means she sees the free-structured Wednesday as a “learning opportunity” to improve herself. The free-structured Wednesday must give the students something to look forward to and having “unstructured time/day” in a week gives students time to have

a break so that they can learn with a new perspective, instead of being pressured and burnt out. Since free-structured Wednesday is unstructured, it should not be totally instructed by the teacher. It requires students to move freely to attend to their native creativity and produce something that they are interested in. Planning learning tasks that create a “community sense”, providing social and emotional support, and building fun in the classroom must be taken into consideration to allow students to see the connections on what they should unlearn, learn, and re-learn. Students having free time with their teachers or peers can be engaging as they set high expectations for learning together. Student 5 emphasized that,

“The free-structured Wednesday affected my performance greatly because it helped me review the lessons that are taught by my teachers and it helped not only me but everyone to do the unfinished task that were given to us and it affected my relationship with my classmates and teachers, also fine because it helps us be independent in the way that we do our own task in our ow.”

In a student-centered classroom, students are creating their own learning in a holistic manner because one of the goals of a student-centered classroom is to produce self-regulating learners who are reflective of their own learning. These are also self-regulating learners who can share their thoughts and insights with others and apply new learning to real-life experiences. In addition, students become focused learners as they fully involve themselves in the learning process (McCombs & Miller, 2007). This can be observed as several participants mentioned that free-structured



Wednesday enhances their relationship with their classmates and teachers as they collaborated and communicated.

Student 6: “It strengthened my relationship with my classmates and teachers because the free-structured Wednesday, it allowed me to work with my classmates during when I need help in my tasks.”

Student 7: “With free-structured Wednesday, we can relax and my relationship with my classmates improved because the free-structured Wednesday help us collaborate and be more sociable.”

Student 8: “The free-structured Wednesday affect my academic performance in the way that we tend to study in advance and be ready for the upcoming lessons that our teachers provided us and it helps us to participate more in our classroom discussions because of this and it affects my relationship to our teachers and classmates because it help us more to work on peers and it gets us close to our teachers because we sometimes are updating for what are the things that we will do.”

Student 9: My relationship with my classmates also improved because with the free-structured Wednesday, I became close to them and with that, I get to test my patience and others things such as teamwork because free-structured Wednesday is not all about academics but also it enhance my skills with my classmates through teamwork and group collaboration .”

mentioned that Free-structured Wednesdays stimulates lack of discipline among students because they are doing non-academic matters, playing computer or online games, roaming around the campus, chit-chatting with friends, creating loud music, searching non-academic stuff, breaks the rule on the use of gadgets, get under pressure because of the numerous tasks and class officers get tired of disciplining classmates as what stated by Student 10, Student 11 and Student 12 respectively:

“The negative feedback is that, some students tend to play online games and don’t do academic tasks that even though class officers already warned them, they still kept on playing and some students don’t use their time wisely and they just do it on some other non-academic tasks.”

“My classmates are making loud noises whenever no more tasks are needed to be done making it hard for me and others to focus on our own task.”

“When collaboration is needed for an activity of ours, some of our classmates don’t cooperate unless they were forced to. It took a lot of tries for them to finally agree.”

Since this is the first time the school has implemented the free-structured Wednesdays, major and minor problems must be addressed. Different issues and concerns about the implementation also depend on the integration of the digital campus.

On the other hand, some of the participants also

Figure 2 highlights that the negative effects of



having unstructured time outweigh the positive effects. This makes challenges evident for the teachers, students, and school itself and must be considered regarding its implementation next school year.

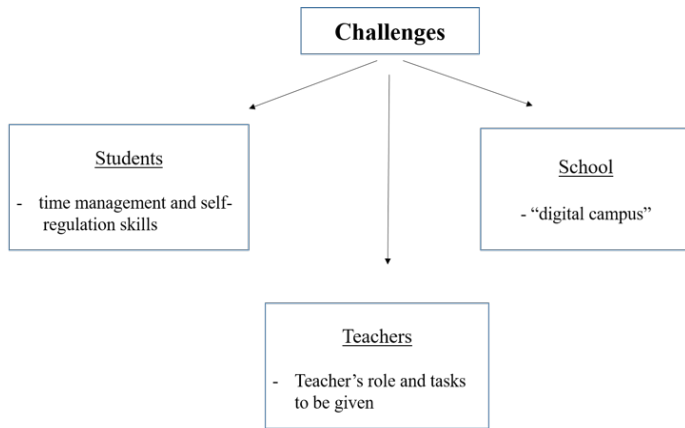


Figure 3. Challenges brought by having a Free-Structured Wednesday

Challenging situations normally occur and the best thing to do is to accept and make these challenges as opportunities for improvement. First, students’ time management and self-regulation skills improved. As can be seen in Figure 2, one of the challenges among the students is how they are going to maximize and utilize the time since they have a total of six unstructured hours excluding break and lunchtime. Based on the participants’ responses, some of the students just play online games and search for non-academic stuff on the internet which wasted their time. Student 13 even mentioned that,

“... our classmates, is not using their time wisely and they are only playing games and sometimes, they are just roaming around the campus or chit-chatting with other classmates.”

Second, the teacher’s role and tasks given to the students are also considered a challenge because there

are no proctors inside the classroom which allows the students to be totally free in what they would want to do to the extent that other students may disrupt the learning style of other students. The numerous tasks given by the teacher control the learning goals set by the students for themselves which makes them under pressure based on the experience of Student 14:

“Me and the other officers have gotten tired of trying to discipline them. Also, we get under pressure sometimes due to the numerous tasks given by subject teachers that are to be finished within the day. Along with my other classmates, I worry if I get to finish the said task on time.”

Lastly, having a “digital campus” is another challenge that all the stakeholders need to contemplate since this can be considered as the root cause of all the minor challenges encountered by the students and teachers. Despite having the challenges, all the stakeholders including the school administrators, teachers, students, and even parents need to work hand in hand for the improvement of the implementation of the free-structured Wednesdays because this is one of the best learning platforms that we can offer to students. When students are actively involved, learning happens best. It encourages collaborative and meaningful learning which allows them to collaborate in solving a given problem. In addition, this also helps students attain the following skills such as:

- a. developing social skills
 - Collaborative learning can happen during a free-structured Wednesday which makes students with different family



backgrounds, geographical boundaries, and cultural circumstances work together. They gather to hear different opinions and learn more about different cultures. Students must communicate and negotiate with one another to address a given problem. This methodology is ideal for introvert learners and have difficulties opening their selves to others.

b. learn from co-students

- Usually, students have various skills, knowledge, and interests. For instance, different students can have different answers to just one question. In addition, they can learn new things from one another and appreciate different perspectives.

c. promote trust

- Students need to work together by promoting trust to finish a given task and achieve goals. For effective collaboration, they need to learn to trust each other no matter what.

d. engage in learning

- Generally, each student has the chance to express his/her ideas. This can give students a feeling of value, importance, and self-worth. Thus, the learning experience becomes more interactive, productive, and meaningful.

e. gain and increase confidence

- As students work as a group, they also obtain more acceptance and support and, therefore, gain confidence. Collaborative learning can help introvert students express themselves more and develop social

skills.

Free-structured Wednesdays sought to teach the students the importance of time management in dealing with academics, personal, and social life. It also allows students to consider which tasks and commitments are the most important and which are unnecessary and can be delegated out. This structure teaches students to be responsible and utilize their time well. In addition, it also helps students to appreciate the value of time because it is about maximizing the time, and the more, they prioritize it the better they will use it. Furthermore, these are some of the good reasons why it is important to manage time:

f. Students become more efficient.

- This does not mean cutting corners or a decrease in quality. Students learn to prioritize and work smarter. They can also learn how to multi-task.

g. Students feel calmer and more in control.

- This matters because it will reduce the amount of unhealthy stress students might feel, They can relax and have more time with their loved ones.

h. Students feel more fulfilled.

- Students will learn to make decisions based on their values and beliefs. Students who know how to prioritize things can manage their time more effectively. Thus, a well-spent time can be a student's fulfillment.

i. Students have more energy.

- Accomplishing academic tasks can bring a level of gratification, and energy comes in as students feel good about themselves.



Moreover, the ability to manage time has a direct and positive impact on students' energy levels.

- j. Students develop more qualities.
 - As students develop their awareness of time, qualities such as responsibility, self-discipline, patience, persistence, and determination improve, as does their learning of 21st-century skills and ability to manage time.
- k. Students achieve what they want to and need to faster; and lastly,
 - Students learn not to waste time and overcome procrastination. They can minimize distractions and commit to the task.
- l. Students enjoy their life more.
 - As students learn to manage and maximize their time, they can create an effective scheduling technique to help them enjoy their life more.

Free-structured Wednesdays offers desirable and undesirable effects but as a catalyst of change, we should embrace its benefits to the students, especially the 21st-century skills that it inexplicitly targets and enhances.

Communication. Using the free-structured Wednesday, teachers must remind students of responsible communication, which is part of their identity. Students' manner of communication with others will define their beliefs and values, whether through face-to-face interaction or online conversations. Developing and honing every aspect of their communication would greatly help their professional and personal

lives.

Collaboration. Our students of today are digital natives and our institution promotes its digitalization. Students should learn how to become a responsible digital citizen who can also become co-creators in technological advancements. They become demotivated and unattached to their learning when they cannot do this in school. Communication and collaboration with others are essential not only to students' learning but to their mental, social, and emotional health as well. It is a skill that our free-structured Wednesday engages the students to collaborate seamlessly in both physical and virtual spaces with real and virtual partners not just here in the Philippines but also abroad.

Creativity. As students are in a continuous condition of development and stimulation with their learning environment. They are natural producers and consumers of information. One of the life skills that must be developed among students is their problem-solving skills in which innovative and creative thinking comes in, and this can be intensely advanced with the appropriate motivation in their learning experience. This may come from accomplishing worthwhile project-based assessments and meaningful tasks such as CAPSTONE that give them real-world problems and are tasked to solve them using real-world solutions. Creativity as a 21st-century skill inspires students to understand their goals, perceive their purpose and apply what they have learned.

Critical Thinking. As society advances, people experience complex issues and problems. For this reason, educational institutions should focus on students'



ability to formulate effective solutions to real-world problems. As students learn to solve and manage these problems, the more successful these students will become. Furthermore, they can turn into problem-solvers who can work independently without any command from somebody else. They are prepared to become risk-takers as they are exposed to learn from their own mistakes. Having the free-structured Wednesday, students can exercise their ability to think systematically through analysis, evaluation, and application of what needs to be done.

Thus, students should be self-regulated in their learning processes inside the classroom and wherever they are. They must acquire “inner discipline” in which they can earn trust, assume responsibility, and acquire the power to make decisions that will develop the fundamental skills not only inside the classroom but also for life effectiveness. With this, students take full responsibility for their learning and gain self-esteem as they realize they are members of a learning community that thrives to cope with the demands of the changing world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

De La Salle Lipa is on the right track to innovate the institution’s teaching and learning practices since students are given this free-structured Wednesday; however, students’ experiences and challenges in implementing Free-structured Wednesdays might vary widely based on their needs, learning styles, and how the concept is implemented in their institution. Many students may have a sense of autonomy on Free-structured Wednesdays. Without the constraints of a regu-

lar class schedule, students can follow their academic interests, participate in creative initiatives, or focus on personal growth. Students who manage their own time may feel more responsible and motivated. With the structure of a set timeframe, students may manage their time efficiently. Some students may need guidance to stay on track, resulting in procrastination or inefficient use of the day. Those with excellent organizing skills may need help to prioritize activities. For this reason, all stakeholders need to ensure that students get that precious academic time by implementing concrete and clearer guidelines for this new time scheme.

Founded on the outcomes of this study, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

1. Although there are roving proctors along the corridors, a teacher or adult companion should be inside the classroom during unstructured Wednesdays to monitor the students closely and ensure they stay on task.
2. Clear guidelines during free-structured Wednesday must be presented to all stakeholders next school year.
3. An evaluation should be conducted every quarter to determine the impact of having free-structured Wednesdays among students, teachers, and even parents.
4. A similar study must be done to explore the challenges and experiences encountered among students and teachers regarding the implementation of the free-structured Wednes-



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