



Perceptions and Experiences of Grade 6 Pupils on the Awareness Prayer

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ABSTRACT

Prayer is part of a Christian's way of life but overly structured routines can lose personal meaning, especially for pupils with limited ability to reflect on God's presence. This study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of Grade 6 students on the Awareness prayer as an alternative prayer routine of finding God in all things aside from routinary prayers. The process of exploration follows the descriptive research design using quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of Grade 6 students. Results show gratitude as the dominant perception, with students practicing breathing and focused thoughts. However, many struggled to pause and imagine God's presence. Recommendations include enhancing mental and emotional engagement through level-appropriate strategies and teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is part of a Christian's way of life. Christian prayer is described as a close, sincere relationship, and communication with God whose love is boundless (Catholic Bishops of the Philippines 1997; Teresa of Avila, 1566). It is both an individual and communal act of faith where persons can express gratitude, offer supplication, find peace, and deepen their spiritual connection with the Creator. However, prayer has become too structured since it follows a set of memorized text or routine which hinders personal connection with God. It becomes routinary rather than heartfelt.

As De Mello (1984) reflects, prayer allows one to be with God, to be aware of His loving presence, to get in touch with the heart rather than to think of what God will say. When this is observed, prayer brings peace and tranquility to the mind, heart and soul. He also highlights that prayer rooted in silence and awareness is not emptiness but presence. It draws a person to an intimate connection with the divine. Thus, prayer becomes not just an expression but an encounter, an opportunity to listen, discern, and be changed. In addition, Grudzińska's (2012) findings claimed that prayer allows individuals to make meaning of their life experiences as they reflect on their spiritual journey and connection with God. He affirmed that prayer is most meaningfully experienced by individuals when it is framed not as an obligation, but as a dialogue, support, or a quest for peace of mind.

Dingle et. al. (2019) noted that for the meaning and habit of prayer to be formed, an individual should be intentional in establishing an inner, spiritual connection and journey with God. Consequently, the study presents that students often recite familiar prayers without reflection or understanding. Thus, when prayer turns into just a routine or a mechanical process, its affective and transformative potential can diminish. This concern is shared by educators who observe a decline in attentiveness and sincerity during prayer moments, particularly in school settings where formulaic prayers are recited frequently and, at times, even rapidly. In a study conducted by Cottrell-Boyce and

Hayes (2022), it was found out that students during prayer and worship activities are seen as "performers" rather than participants. They are seen to be involved physically during rituals but not spiritually which in turn results to routine-driven response, less intimacy and engagement to the divine.

Prayer plays an important role in student formation. The school envisions to produce graduates whose lives are centered on Christ, who is the model of human life. Ateneo Hearters are provided with encounters and experiences that allow them to see God clearly, to love Him more dearly and to follow Him nearly. These are enriched through celebrations of the sacraments, faith formation classes, recollection, retreats and other prayer encounters.

One of which is the practice of Ignatian Examen, alongside with formula prayers that are recited at the start of every class period which set the sacred tone for each day. These practices seek to help build a community grounded in faith and Christ-centeredness. However, it was observed that a growing disconnects between sincere and active prayer and the students' participation. The prayer moments, although ordered, often feel hasty and superficial, which limits the students' ability to enter into a deep and meaningful encounter with God.

To address this concern, Christian Life Formation (CLF) teachers introduced a new format of prayer beginning in School Year 2023–2024: the Awareness Prayer. This prayer routine, adapted from the Examen of St. Ignatius of Loyola, replaces the recited formula prayer at the beginning of CLF classes. Its goals are the following: (1) to help pupils become more disposed to encountering God in the CLF lessons and activities, (2) to augment and enrich the school's existing prayer practices, (3) to ensure that the class opening prayer becomes truly Ignatian-reflective, personal, and spiritually engaging and (4) to develop among the pupils the habit of reflection seeking to find God in all things.

The Awareness prayer begins with a mindfulness exercise to set and dispose the pupils to prayer. It follows a simplified step, among others is the 5-Rs mnemonic: (1) Relish the moments that went well and all of the gifts I have today as a way of noticing and being aware of God's presence in one's daily experiences; (2) Request the Spirit to lead one through the review of the day; (3) Review the day, acknowledge the graces and challenges one receives and appreciate for these; (4) Repent any mistakes or failures as a result of making meaning of one's thoughts, actions and emotions; (5) Resolve, in concrete ways, to live tomorrow well forming intentions to live more purposefully. This prayer routine ends by glorifying the One Triune God through reciting the "Glory Be".

This practice is firmly rooted in the Ignatian spirituality and pedagogy. One of its pronounced significant dimensions is Reflection on Experience. St. Ignatius emphasized the significance of making meaning and reflecting on one's experiences through discernment and prayer can lead one to go beyond mere acquisition of knowledge to a greater scheme that is, the attainment of the action to which is believed to be where the Spirit of God is leading. This approach is central to Ignatian spiritual practice and is exemplified by the Examen, or Examination of Consciousness (Vu, 2022). The Examen, patterned from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, is a way of prayerfully reflecting on one's daily experiences (Rader & Plante, 2023) to recognize God's presence and discern His will. It is a prayer of finding God in all things, carefully paying attention to how the Spirit is moving in one's life. Thus, this study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of Grade 6 pupils on the Awareness Prayer.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive research design, which focused on portraying the characteristics of a population or phenomenon as it exists in its natural context rather than investigating underlying causes or relationships (Siedlecki, 2020; Atmowardoyo, 2018). This approach was appropriate for exploring the Grade 6 pupils' perceptions and experiences of the Awareness Prayer within their CLF classes.

The sample consisted of 185 Grade 6 pupils (Catholic and non-Catholic) enrolled in SY 2024–2025, selected through population sampling for the survey and purposive quota sampling for interviews. Data were collected using a validated researcher-made questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire included two parts: perceptions (awareness, gratitude, reflection, resolution) and experiences (physical, mental, emotional-spiritual), rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Pilot testing yielded high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.825$), confirming internal consistency.

Ethical approval was secured from the school and research ethics committee, with parental consent and pupil assent obtained in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Surveys were administered during CLF classes, and interviews continued until data saturation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were transcribed and thematically coded to enrich interpretation. All data were securely stored and will be retained for three years to ensure confidentiality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student's Perceptions on Awareness Prayer

The perceptions of Grade 6 pupils on Awareness Prayer are essential as it provides valuable insights into how children at this developmental stage understand and internalize spiritual practices. The respondents begin to develop the capacity for abstract thinking, self-reflection, and emotional awareness making it a crucial period for exploring how prayer influences their sense of self, values, and connection with others. Awareness prayer, which encourages individuals to recognize daily experiences with mindfulness and intentionality, offers an opportunity to cultivate gratitude for positive moments, deepen self-awareness, reflect on actions and choices, and form resolutions for personal growth. Exploring how Grade 6 learners perceive and practice these elements through prayer can provide valuable insights into their spiritual, moral and emotional development that foster holistic well-being, resilience, and character formation among young learners. The table below shows the Grade 6 pupils' perceptions on the Awareness prayer.

Table 1. Perceptions of Grade 6 Learners on Awareness Prayer

Perceptions	Category	Rating	Interpretation
1. admiring the beauty and goodness of the world around me.	Awareness	3.27	Highly Agree
2. becoming aware of God's role in my life.	Awareness	3.59	Highly Agree
3. deepening my connection with God.	Awareness	3.49	Highly Agree
4. appreciating the blessings that God gave me.	Gratitude	3.69	Highly Agree
5. thanking God for the positive experiences of the day.	Gratitude	3.50	Highly Agree
6. feeling grateful on the good things that God gave me.	Gratitude	3.66	Highly Agree
7. feeling at peace as I tell God what my heart desires.	Reflection	3.30	Highly Agree
8. reflecting on what I truly need as I pray for my intentions.	Reflection	3.26	Highly Agree
9. asking sincerely for specific graces from God.	Reflection	3.47	Highly Agree
10. recalling areas of my life that I need to change for the better.	Resolution	3.28	Highly Agree
11. recognizing and admitting my sins before God's mercy.	Resolution	3.53	Highly Agree
12. humbling myself as I tell God about my sins.	Resolution	3.39	Highly Agree
Overall		3.45	Highly Agree
Legend:	1.00 – 1.75	Highly Disagree	
	1.76 – 2.51	Disagree	
	2.52 – 3.27	Agree	
	3.28 – 4.00	Highly Agree	

The Grade 6 Learners have high agreement on all perceptions towards awareness prayer. This suggests that the awareness prayer has successfully developed the target intentions of the activity. In average, they have highly perceived the awareness prayer as an opportunity to express gratitude, to be aware of God's presence, to reflect on their actions and feelings, and to beg for God's forgiveness respectively. In a study among students in Turkey, it is found that guided prayer promotes the act and the feeling of gratitude which in consequent, establishes their relationship with the divine. (Guajardo, 2022). Hence, awareness prayer connects the Grade 6 pupils to God through gratitude. It is in this act of gratitude that they become reflective of their actions and feelings. Furthermore, the results imply that the aspects of awareness prayer are closely interconnected when the learner attains one aspect the rest follows.

In the interview, the respondents expressed that Awareness prayer allows them to convey their gratefulness to God as they review their day's activities. One pupil voiced out that, "Yes it makes me thankful for everything he has given me because during the awareness prayer I remember and express my gratefulness to him." The conveying of their gratitude through Awareness prayer allows them to review, reflect and connect to God. A pupil mentioned that, "I feel like God is with me, and I'm happy that He is with me, cares for me, and helps me." Consequently, this connection with the Divine makes them realize of the actions that require resolution to strengthen their relationship with God. Another pupil said that, "It gives us a realization that we should change and we should repent our sins to the Lord." These testimonies signify that Awareness prayer helps improve the totality of the spirituality of the pupils. These are further supported with studies in other countries showing the connection of gratitude to God towards the spiritual growth of an individual. In a five-year longitudinal study on the perceptions of learners, a significant positive correlation was observed between there.

These are further supported with studies in other countries showing the connection of gratitude to God towards the spiritual growth of an individual. In a five-year longitudinal study on the perceptions of learners, a significant positive correlation was observed between their perceptions of gratitude towards their spiritual growth (Bosacki, et al., 2018). The same is observed among heart failure patients. In this study, it was found out that the level of gratitude of patients positively affects their spiritual well-being, which in turn improved their physical and mental well-being (Mills, et al., 2015). Another study has also found the possibility of one's gratitude to God as an indicator and predictor of one's spiritual well-being (Watkins, et al., 2022). These suggest that the practice of gratitude leads learners towards deeper connection with God. In a psychological investigation, it was found out that gratitude to God develops towards deeper connection to God as the individual continues to improve one's spiritual well-being (Guajardo, 2022). This is an intended outcome that the Awareness Prayer activity aims to achieve and has successfully fostered.

However, it must be understood that the gratitude developed in the Awareness Prayer activity is an outcome of the learners' feelings towards God rather than it being doctrinal. It is expected as young learners tend to be directed by their feelings towards the divine and not by the textual reference of love and gratitude. In fact, an integrated review of the effects of gratitude to God has shown that the expression of gratitude towards God is guided more by their heartfelt conception and not based on doctrines (Watkins, et al., 2024). Another study has supported the observation that the construction of spiritual gratitude among young individuals are dependent on the social and cultural context they are in (Pohan, et al., 2025). Hence, it is important that the habit of gratitude is developed among young learners for it to become a social and cultural foundation that assist in establishing their connection to God.

Creating prayer experiences for Grade 6 pupils through Awareness Prayer helps young children connect more deeply with their faith by encouraging mindfulness, reflection, and personal engagement with God. At this developmental stage, children are beginning to form their own understanding of the world and their place in it. Awareness prayer fosters a sense of inner stillness and attentiveness, allowing them to become more conscious of God's presence in their daily lives. This type of prayer nurtures emotional and spiritual growth, helping students to recognize the sacred in ordinary moments, develop gratitude, and build a stronger, more personal relationship with God. Through guided experiences, they learn to listen not just with their ears, but with their hearts, cultivating a lifelong habit of prayerful awareness.

Student's Experiences on Awareness Prayer

Through guided experiences, they learn to listen not just with their ears, but with their hearts, cultivating a lifelong habit of prayerful awareness. These experiences are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Experiences of Grade 6 Learners on Awareness Prayer

Experiences	Category	Percent of Learners
Observe mindful breathing exercise	Physical	78%
Focus and calm one's thoughts	Physical	71%
Enhance my prayerful disposition and mindset	Physical	57%
Befriend and feel comfortable with silence	Physical	62%
Feel a sense of peace in my physical surroundings	Mental	60%
Pause and acknowledge the present moment.	Mental	47%
Reflect about the feelings I felt within the day	Mental	58%
Bring my thoughts and worries in prayer	Mental	64%
Imagine God's face and presence as I prayed.	Emotional - Spiritual	56%
Speak to God from the heart.	Emotional - Spiritual	73%
Engage in a meaningful conversation with God.	Emotional - Spiritual	57%
Identify and thank God for the graces received.	Emotional - Spiritual	77%

The top 5 experiences of the learners in the awareness prayer are observing mindful breathing exercise, identifying and thanking God for graces received, speaking to God from the heart, focusing and calming one's thoughts, and bringing their thoughts and worries in prayer respectively. The 5 least experienced by the learners in the awareness prayer are pausing and acknowledging the present moment, imagining God's face and presence, enhancement of their prayerful disposition and mindset, engaging in a meaningful conversation with God, and reflecting about the feelings felt within the day respectively.

In the study on the undergraduate students, Adams et al. (2019) found that prayer has positively affected the cognitive process of the students especially on their attention to their bodies and environment. Engaging in prayer helped in liberating their thoughts about problems, worries and ruminations. While older students may be guided toward the development of their physical, emotional, and cognitive domains through prayer, younger learners demonstrate a greater perceptiveness and receptivity to these influences. This is supported by Fazlollahi et al. (2022) that children have better spiritual sensitivity when engaged in meaningful prayer.

In the interview, the respondents claimed that through the mindfulness breathing exercise they are able to dispose themselves to prayer for an intimate conversation with God. One pupil said "Breathing exercise helps me feel more relaxed and calm my mind to organized my thoughts so that I can have the proper manner of speaking to the Lord." The respondents added that when they are observing the appropriate disposition, they are able to bring their worries, feelings, and fears to God. A pupil commented, "It allows me to have a heartfelt conversation with God because at that time I stay focused and express everything what I feel, my worries, fears and everything that is hard." Through their introspection, the pupils are able to recognize that God is with them, listening and comforting them. A pupil lovingly expressed, "When I do the Awareness Prayer, it'll make me feel relaxed and

knowing that God is listening to me." The sharing of these comments from the respondents signifies that in order to enter into the Awareness prayer, physical, mental, and emotional-spiritual dimensions should be in place.

CONCLUSION

The Awareness prayer offers an opportunity to have an intimate conversation with God. Learners perceive that this prayer routine allowed them to deepen their connection and relationship with Him through becoming aware of His divine presence within and beyond themselves.

As they recognized and became aware of these, they acknowledge these graces which in turn made gratitude as the central point of the Awareness prayer. Through it, the respondents became more mindful and reflective of their day-to-day experiences including their thoughts and feelings which moved them to improve their actions and dealings with others and God – from appreciation to introspection. This flow of prayer suggests that the components utilized are connected and when one component is observed, the others flow seamlessly. Thus, providing meaningful opportunities for the respondents to direct their personal prayer intentions and desires to God, who is all-knowing and loving.

Consequently, the experiences of the respondents on the Awareness prayer denote the prayer's potential to nurture emotional regulation and spiritual intimacy. Students reach a state of gratitude to God as they converse and lift their prayer intentions to Him while observing mindful breathing practices. This connects to the idea presented in the respondent's perception that gratitude is the central theme of the Awareness prayer.

In addition, students experienced the application of the doctrines and values learned in CLF classes to their personal lives. Thus, the Awareness prayer aligns with the CLF's goal of faith formation deeply rooted in developing the habit of finding God in all things through prayer and reflection. In connection to this, it is recommended that the continued implementation of the Awareness

prayer in CLF classes be sustained and integrated in the subject's daily routine.

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