



LEARNERS' AND TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES ON PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: BASES FOR TRAINING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the experiences of learners and teachers in implementing Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as basis for a training program. It was found that the positive lived experiences of learners include engaging and motivating, building confidence, encouraging collaboration, enjoyable and interesting, and relating to real world situation. On the other hand, negative experiences include encountering time constraints, sharing different ideas, and struggling to find solutions. The lived experiences of teachers were grouped into positive and negative experiences, and coping strategies. Positive experiences include more engaged and curious learners, active and creative learners, and collaborative learners. Teachers' negative experiences include learners' lack of understanding of complex concepts, learners' struggles with group organization, learners' time constraints and resource limitations, and learners' diversity within the classroom. To cope with, they employed the contextualization of lessons, implementation of step-by-step process and progress monitoring, encouragement of group work, and application of differentiated instructions.

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Keywords: *Learners, Teachers, Lived Experiences, Problem-Based Learning, Training Program*

INTRODUCTION

Problem-Based Learning has emerged globally as a transformative student-centered instructional approach that redefines traditional teaching and learning dynamics. Unlike conventional methods where the teacher primarily delivers content, Problem Based Learning engages learners with real-world problems first, promoting collaborative investigation and solution-seeking. Based on constructivist principles, Project-Based Learning (PBL) transforms students into active learners. Instead of passively receiving information, they build their own knowledge through investigation, self-reflection, and hands-on experience—a process that ultimately strengthens their independence, analytical reasoning, and ability to solve complex problems. By emphasizing engagement and relevance, PBL enables learners to approach complex problems creatively and analytically, transforming them from passive recipients into active contributors to their learning journey.

Despite its growing adoption and documented benefits, PBL presents challenges for both learners and educators. Many students value the autonomy and real-world applicability of Problem-Based Learning, yet some struggle with self-directed learning, particularly in teacher-centered contexts. Learners with lower academic preparation or inconsistent attendance may find the transition to PBL demanding, potentially impacting engagement, comprehension, and overall outcomes (Orhan, 2025). These challenges underscore the need

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for scaffolding, structured guidance, and continuous support to ensure equitable access to PBL benefits. From the teacher’s perspective, successful PBL implementation requires a shift from content delivery to facilitation, guiding inquiry, fostering collaboration, and managing classroom dynamics. Teachers may encounter difficulties due to limited professional training, insufficient resources, large class sizes, and rigid curricular schedules, which can hinder effective adoption (Aidoo, 2023).

Empirical studies indicate that while educators appreciate PBL for promoting engagement, higher-order thinking, and classroom interaction, they also report challenges related to time management, resource allocation, and designing meaningful PBL tasks. Many feel unprepared to manage collaborative, student-centered learning environments, particularly in contexts where traditional structured teaching dominates (Aidoo, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires targeted professional development, institutional support, and evidence-based strategies that equip teachers with skills in PBL design, facilitation, and assessment. Similarly, understanding learner difficulties can guide scaffolding strategies that support self-directed learning, effective collaboration, and the practical application of theoretical knowledge (Aidoo, 2023).

While existing literature highlights the benefits and challenges of Problem-Based Learning for both students and teachers, there is limited research that simultaneously examines the lived experiences of both stakeholders within the same educational context. Few studies systematically explore how learner challenges intersect with teacher facilitation practices, or how these dynamics influence overall Problem-Based Learning effectiveness.

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Investigating these experiences concurrently can inform the design of targeted training programs, resource allocation strategies, and instructional frameworks that address both learner and teacher needs, ensuring the successful and sustainable implementation of Problem-Based Learning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology, research design, and participant selection, alongside the instruments and procedures used for data collection and analysis. The study was conducted to investigate the firsthand experiences of both students and educators during the application of Problem-Based Learning. These insights were then utilized as a foundational framework for developing a training program specifically designed to bridge the practical gaps and requirements identified in the research.

Research Method

The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing in-depth interviews as the primary mode of data collection. This specific methodological choice allowed for a detailed exploration of the participants' perspectives through direct, personal engagement.

The descriptive research framework is designed to provide a systematic account of a phenomenon exactly as it occurs in its original environment, strictly avoiding any manipulation of variables. As highlighted by Elliott (2025), this method intends to deliver a precise representation of existing practices, conditions, or social dynamics within an educational

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context, which helps researchers identify significant trends and practical consequences. This strategy is especially effective for academic inquiries that aim to record and evaluate authentic occurrences or perceptions while maintaining the integrity of the natural setting (Elliott (2025).

During the sessions, the researcher and the participant were positioned at a comfortable distance, providing a quiet space for the interviewee to reflect deeply on the sequence of questions presented. The overarching goal of this setup was to extract the essential viewpoints and core insights of the participants regarding specific issues. By facilitating these responses within a relaxed social context, the study was able to capture the authentic voices and lived realities of those involved.

Research Design

This research utilized a phenomenological design, which is widely recognized as a philosophical framework for conducting qualitative inquiry. The primary objective of this methodology is to grasp how individuals perceive their world and to identify how these personal outlooks might diverge from mainstream perspectives. By centering the investigation on a person’s subjective interpretation of their lived reality, researchers can uncover unique insights that objective data might miss. This process is typically executed through comprehensive interviews aimed at capturing the specific impressions of participants—a technique frequently embraced in human-centric disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and social work.

Phenomenology prioritizes the exploration of the structures of consciousness as they are perceived from a firsthand, subjective vantage point. According to Biemel and Spiegelberg

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(2024), the fundamental goal is to examine and articulate phenomena exactly as they appear to the conscious mind. This requires the researcher to describe these experiences in their purest form, without relying on theories regarding causal explanations or being swayed by unverified assumptions. By intentionally setting aside pre-existing biases, the study ensures that the final description remains authentic to the participant's original experience.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study consisted of seven (7) purposively selected science teachers and ten (10) purposively selected learners from the Schools District of Maasin. The teacher participants included one (1) representative from each school in the district. The learner participants comprised four (4) students from the Mother School and one (1) student from each of the six (6) barangay high schools.

All participants were selected based on their prior exposure to or experience with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in science classes. Specifically, teachers were chosen for their involvement in implementing PBL strategies, while learners were selected from classrooms where PBL was utilized as a core component of instructional delivery.

The study did not include teachers and learners from other learning areas. It also did not aim to measure academic achievement, test scores, or quantitative learning outcomes associated with PBL. Furthermore, the study was limited to participants from the Schools District of Maasin.

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Sampling Design

The study implemented a purposive sampling design to identify and select its participants.

As defined by Nikolopoulou (2023), this approach encompasses a variety of non-probability sampling methods where specific units are chosen based on the unique characteristics they possess that align with the research requirements. Essentially, the inclusion of participants in this model is intentional rather than random, ensuring that every subject serves a specific function in the investigation.

This sampling method, frequently referred to as judgmental sampling, centers on the specialized expertise and discretion of the researcher. Rather than relying on random selection, the investigator carefully assesses and selects specific participants, scenarios, or events believed to offer the most substantial and pertinent information. By applying this informed selection strategy, the researcher guarantees that the chosen sample is strategically aligned with the study's primary aims and research questions.

Research Instrument

For this investigation, the researcher developed an original interview schedule to serve as the primary data collection tool. This bespoke instrument was carefully crafted to ensure total alignment with the study's particular goals and the specific environment in which the research took place.

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Within the realm of research methodology, an interview schedule acts as a formal registry of pre-planned questions—which can range from highly structured to open-ended—designed to offer a reliable roadmap for the interviewer. By functioning as a standardized gathering device, it ensures that all participants address the same central themes and inquiries, a factor that is indispensable for conducting a rigorous and systematic comparison of the data. Whether the dialogue occurs in a face-to-face setting, over the telephone, or through digital channels, the researcher utilizes this guide to present the set items and record participant input in a consistent manner (Socio.health, 2024).

The specific guide created for this study was organized around two pivotal questions that explored the lived experiences of both learners and instructors during the implementation of Problem-Based Learning. These focal points were intended to generate the deep insights required to serve as a practical foundation for a new teacher training program.

To maintain a high standard of accuracy and provide a detailed record of the proceedings, the researcher employed both audio and video recording equipment. The deployment of these digital tools was governed by strict ethical protocols, meaning they were only used once the participants had granted their explicit permission for such documentation.

Validity of the Research Instrument

Before the researcher’s interview schedule was finalized, it underwent a rigorous validation process involving the thesis adviser, the Dean of the Graduate School, and a select panel of experts. these jurors were chosen specifically for their proficiency in research

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methodology, assessment and testing, and English linguistics to review and refine each question. Validity is defined as the degree to which a study's results, interpretations, and final assertions accurately and appropriately represent the specific concepts being researched. It serves as a guarantee that the research tool effectively measures its intended variables and that the resulting data provides a trustworthy reflection of the real world. To establish content validity, both the phrasing of the questions and the overall structure of the instrument must be meticulously aligned with the study's defined goals and variables. This ensures that every item is a precise reflection of the theoretical construct under review. Typically, this stage requires a professional audit to confirm that the items are pertinent, lucid, and representative of the core topics. By synchronizing the instrument's content with the research framework, investigators improve the precision and practical value of the gathered data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

All feedback, including critical comments and technical corrections provided by the validation panel, was integrated into the final interview schedule. This refinement process followed the standardized evaluation criteria of Good and Scates (1972), as referenced in the work of Soqueña (2021).

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher navigated a comprehensive hierarchical approval protocol, securing formal consent from every level of the educational and academic bureaucracy. This began with internal academic clearance from the research adviser and the Dean of the Graduate School, followed by external administrative permits from the Schools Division Superintendent

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and District Supervisors. By obtaining further authorization from School Heads and the individual subjects themselves, the researcher ensured the study was grounded in full legal and ethical compliance across all institutional layers.

To maintain the integrity of the naturalistic inquiry, the researcher adopted a mobile, participant-centric approach to fieldwork. By personally traveling to schools or community locations deemed most convenient by the interviewees, the researcher minimized "participant burden" and fostered a comfortable environment conducive to authentic disclosure. Before any data was recorded, a critical ethical safeguard was implemented: the formalization of informed consent through signed waivers, ensuring that all participants were fully aware of their rights and the study's scope.

The data acquisition phase relied on technological precision to support the qualitative depth of the in-depth interviews. The dual use of audio and video recording served as a primary mechanism for "member checking" and data fidelity, ensuring that the participants' exact phrasing and nuances were preserved without the distortion of manual note-taking. This meticulous collection phase concluded with the systematic consolidation of all recorded materials, transforming raw verbal exchanges into a structured dataset ready for thematic analysis.

Data Analyses

The analytical processing of the gathered narratives was conducted through thematic analysis, a sophisticated qualitative framework designed to systematically decode, interpret,

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and categorize recurring patterns within textual data. This methodological choice was strategic, as it allowed the researcher to move beyond surface-level responses to uncover the profound lived experiences of both students and educators. By distilling these narratives into structured themes, the study established a robust empirical foundation for the subsequent design of a targeted teacher training program.

According to Braun and Clarke (2023), thematic analysis offers a unique blend of flexibility and academic rigor, enabling the researcher to detect both explicit statements and latent, underlying meanings within the participants' stories. This makes the method particularly effective for educational research, where social and organizational complexities often overlap. Furthermore, Nowell et al. (2021) argue that this approach bolsters the study's credibility and transparency by requiring a highly disciplined coding process, ensuring that the final interpretations are deeply rooted in the actual data rather than researcher bias. The transcribed data from the interviews were processed using this model to identify and report the essential patterns that emerged from the qualitative discourse.

The analysis strictly adhered to a standardized six-phase process, beginning with data familiarization, which involved an immersive review of the transcripts in both the local language and English translations. Following this, the researcher engaged in the generation of initial codes by assigning descriptive labels to meaningful segments of data, such as "poor signal" or "fear of judgment." In the third phase, these codes were clustered into potential overarching themes and sub-themes, such as grouping "private correction" and "no insult" under a broader conceptual category. The final stages of the analysis focused on refining and

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validating these patterns. During the fourth phase, the themes were reviewed against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' meanings and the study's specific focus. Once validated, the fifth phase involved defining and naming the themes with clear, academically sound titles, which are presented in the subsequent chapter of the study. Finally, the process culminated in the production of a formal report, where the identified themes were woven into a narrative structure supported by direct participant quotes and linked back to the overarching theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This qualitative inquiry examined the firsthand perspectives of students and educators regarding the execution of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to guide the creation of a specialized training initiative.

The research was carried out within designated public institutions in the Maasin School District during the 2025–2026 academic term, featuring a cohort of seven science instructors and ten students who had previously engaged with the PBL model. To guarantee that the data reflected deep and pertinent expertise, a purposive sampling strategy was employed for participant selection. The primary information was collected via detailed, in-depth interviews that concentrated on the authentic, lived encounters of these individuals within PBL-driven science curricula. The study was delimited to science subjects, did not measure academic achievement or quantitative outcomes, and was limited to the Maasin district, restricting generalizability.

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Findings aimed to provide qualitative insights into PBL's effectiveness and challenges to guide the design of a targeted training program.

The study's findings are outlined below:

Based on the detailed personal interviews conducted with the subjects, the research revealed that the first-hand encounters of students during the roll-out of Problem-Based Learning can be categorized into two distinct areas: positive and negative experiences.

For positive experiences, learners experienced problem-based learning as engaging and motivating, building confidence, encouraging collaboration, enjoyable and interesting, and relating to real world situation.

For negative experiences on problem-based learning, learners experienced encountering time constraints, sharing different ideas, and struggling to find solutions.

Based on the results of the in-depth interview with the participants, it was found out that the lived experiences of teachers in the implementation of the problem-based learning are grouped into positive and negative experiences, and coping strategies.

For positive experiences of teachers in the implementation of Problem-based learning, they experienced more engaged and curious learners, active and creative learners, and collaborative learners.

For negative experiences on problem-based learning, teachers experienced learners' lack of understanding of complex concepts, learners' struggles with group organization, learners' time constraints and resource limitations, and learners' diversity within the classroom.

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For coping strategies employed by teachers in the implementation of problem-based learning, they applied the contextualization of lessons, implementation of step-by-step process and progress monitoring, encouragement of group work, and application of differentiated instructions.

CONCLUSION

Learners' experiences with Problem-Based Learning were mixed, reflecting both benefits and challenges. While some students reported increased engagement, motivation, and skill development, others faced difficulties such as understanding complex concepts and managing group dynamics. This indicates that PBL can be highly impactful when supported appropriately but also requires careful facilitation to address potential obstacles and ensure all learners benefit.

Learners found Problem-Based Learning highly stimulating and meaningful, as it actively involved them in the learning process, fostered a sense of competence, and allowed them to connect classroom activities to practical situations. These experiences not only enhanced their participation and enthusiasm but also supported the development of important social and cognitive skills, making learning more relevant and impactful.

Learners faced challenges in managing the demands of Problem-Based Learning, including balancing tasks within limited time, navigating differing perspectives within groups, and overcoming obstacles in problem-solving. These difficulties highlight the need for structured guidance, effective collaboration strategies, and support to help students manage

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cognitive and social demands while engaging with complex tasks.

Teachers' experiences with Problem-Based Learning were multifaceted, encompassing both rewarding and challenging aspects, as well as strategies they employed to manage these challenges. While teachers recognized the benefits of PBL in enhancing student engagement and learning, they also faced obstacles that required adaptation, reflection, and practical approaches to effectively facilitate the method in their classrooms.

Teachers observed that implementing Problem-Based Learning led to more dynamic and participatory classrooms, where students actively explored concepts, demonstrated creativity in their approaches, and effectively worked together. These outcomes suggest that PBL fosters a learning environment that encourages student initiative, deeper understanding, and meaningful interaction.

Teachers faced challenges in facilitating Problem-Based Learning due to students' difficulties with grasping challenging content, managing collaborative tasks, and balancing workload with limited resources. Additionally, differences in learners' abilities and backgrounds required careful attention, highlighting the need for targeted support and strategies to ensure all students can effectively engage and benefit from PBL.

Teachers addressed challenges in Problem-Based Learning by adapting their instruction to students' needs, providing structured guidance, fostering collaboration, and tailoring tasks to individual abilities. These approaches helped support student understanding, maintain engagement, and promote effective participation in both independent and group activities.

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