



EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN A CHALLENGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: BASES FOR RECOMMENDATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences, as well as the hindering and facilitating factors, encountered by teachers working in challenging learning environments. The findings revealed three major experiences: (1) navigating learner diversity through flexible and differentiated instruction, (2) coping with limited resources through creativity and improvisation, and (3) deriving fulfillment, growth, and resilience from teaching despite difficulties. Hindering factors included socioeconomic constraints affecting learners' readiness, insufficient instructional materials, limited technology, overcrowded classrooms, and low parental involvement. Facilitating factors that supported teachers included strong collaboration with colleagues and school leaders, positive teacher-student relationships, community and parental engagement, and continuous professional development. Insights highlighted that teacher adaptability and relational support significantly mitigated environmental challenges, while systemic resource gaps intensified instructional burdens. The RESILIENCE Program was recommended to strengthen instructional capacity, resource mobilization, teacher well-being, and community collaboration.

Keywords: Teacher Experiences, Challenging Environment

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INTRODUCTION

The learning environment plays a vital role in shaping the teaching and learning process, as it directly influences teachers’ instructional practices, well-being, and overall effectiveness. Within the Department of Education (DepEd), many public-school teachers continue to encounter challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, poor ventilation, excessive noise, and limited instructional resources. These environmental constraints significantly affect teachers’ ability to deliver quality instruction and may lead to increased stress, fatigue, and reduced job satisfaction. A supportive and conducive learning environment is therefore essential not only for learners’ academic success but also for sustaining teachers’ professional performance and well-being.

Recent studies have examined how teachers cope with unfavorable learning conditions. Tortola (2024) emphasized that a conducive physical environment contributes to teacher resilience and instructional efficiency, while Baraquia (2022) explored adaptive strategies employed by teachers facing resource shortages and infrastructural limitations. Similarly, Caratiquit and Caratiquit (2022) highlighted issues related to poor ventilation and inadequate lighting, particularly during and after the pandemic, noting that teachers were compelled to modify their workspaces to maintain effective teaching. Calma and Paragas (2024) focused on newly hired teachers, revealing the difficulties they encounter in adjusting to suboptimal classroom environments. Although these studies provide valuable insights into teachers’ coping mechanisms, they largely focus on short-term adaptations and do not

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comprehensively address the long-term effects of challenging learning environments on teachers' instructional effectiveness and overall well-being.

This study assessed the impact of a challenging learning environment on teachers' instructional effectiveness and well-being. It examined how teachers adapted to infrastructure-related challenges and analyzed the extent to which DepEd policies supported improvements in physical learning conditions. B

By addressing gaps in existing research, the study generated evidence-based insights that informed the development of a recommendation program to enhance the learning environment. Ultimately, the findings may contribute to improved teaching conditions, supported teacher well-being, and promote more meaningful and effective teaching and learning experiences within the educational system.

Over the years, the researcher has taught in classrooms where poor ventilation, constant noise, limited instructional materials, and overcrowded spaces made daily teaching difficult. These conditions hindered the effective delivery of lessons. Observing fellow teachers face the same challenges showed that these issues were not isolated experiences but shared burdens within the profession. This strengthened the researcher's resolve to examine the problem more deeply and systematically.

Through this research, the researcher developed a recommendation program aimed at improving the learning environment so that both teachers and students could experience more meaningful and effective teaching and learning.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research method, research design, participants of the study, sampling design, research instrument, data-gathering procedure, and data analysis used in the study.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach because it aimed to explore and understand the experiences of English teachers in challenging learning environment

Qualitative research is best suited for investigating human experiences, meanings, and perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2022). It allows the researcher to gather in-depth information through interviews and observations, which are essential in understanding the real situation inside classrooms.

Research Design

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of participants in a challenging learning environment.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that aims to explore and describe the lived experiences of individuals to uncover the essence of a phenomenon, emphasizing participants' perspectives without imposing prior assumptions or theoretical interpretations (Moustakas, 2021). In this study, the focus is on capturing the experiences of English teachers teaching in a challenging learning environment.

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Participants in the Study

The participants of the study were fifteen (15) English teachers from public schools in the District of San Enrique, Schools Division of Iloilo. They were selected through purposive sampling because they had direct experiences teaching in challenging learning environments, which made them capable of providing rich and relevant information for the study. The participants taught English and encountered various classroom challenges, such as limited instructional resources, diverse learner needs, and varying classroom conditions. Their professional experiences and daily interactions with students enabled them to provide valuable insights into the realities and difficulties of teaching in such environments.

Sampling Design

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher intentionally selects participants based on specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the research topic, as well as their ability and willingness to provide rich, informative data (Palinkas et al., 2021).

The inclusion criteria were considered in determining the participants of the study. These are: (1) Participants are English teachers in a public school; (2) The participants' workstation located in the Public School District of San Enrique, SDO - Iloilo, and (3) The participants experienced challenging learning environment.

Research Instrument

This study used a researcher-made interview guide to explore the experiences of English teachers teaching in a challenging environment.

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The instrument contained four documents. (1) Recruitment letter to participants was used to inform formally the participant that he/she was selected as a respondent of the study and an assurance of confidentiality was crucially considered; (2) Letter of Consent to Interview is an assent letter. It will be used to inform the researcher of the affirmation and refutation responses of the participants. A signature and date will be affixed to the name to close the letter; and, (3) an Interview Schedule has four open-ended questions. These questions were aligned with the main objective of the study.

Validity of the Research Instrument

To establish the validity of the instrument, the initial draft of the text was reviewed by the thesis adviser and presented for face and content validation and item inspection to a panel of experts in the field of sciences, tests and measurements, and statistics. The panel of experts inspected each item based on the appropriateness or suitability, relevance, clarity of the language used, correctness of sentences, and others. The corrections, recommendations, and suggestions for the refinement of the instrument were incorporated in the final draft of the instrument.

In establishing content-related evidence of validity, the items and structure of a research instrument must align with the operational definitions of the variables and the characteristics of the target population. This alignment ensures that the instrument appropriately represents the construct being measured and that the items are relevant, clear, and capable of producing meaningful data (Sulaiman et al., 2021). Comments, corrections,

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and suggestions of the panel of validators regarding the items of the interview guide were considered for the final draft.

Data-Gathering Procedures

In conducting the study, the researcher strictly adhered to the government's safety protocols to ensure the health and safety of all participants. A formal requests for permission to conduct the study were submitted to the principal's office of selected schools in San Enrique, Iloilo. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select participants. This targeted selection will ensure that the participants have relevant experiences and insights into the subject matter.

Once the participants have been identified, the researcher coordinated with the school heads to schedule the interviews. Prior to the interview, the researcher sought the participants' informed consent to record the discussions, ensuring that they are aware of the recording and its purpose. They were also informed that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary.

At the start of the interview, the researcher established trust and rapport with the participants by sharing with them friendly gestures and greetings. The purpose of the study was explained.

Data Analyses

After conducting the interviews, the researcher consolidated all collected data for analysis using a thematic analysis approach, which is widely recognized in qualitative research for identifying patterns and meaning across datasets. Thematic analysis involves

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systematically coding and interpreting interview data to uncover common themes, patterns, and insights that reflect participants lived experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This method allows the researcher to move beyond mere description by engaging in thoughtful interpretation as codes are selected and themes are constructed, producing a detailed, coherent account of the experiences of teachers working in challenging environments. By following a structured yet flexible analytic procedure—such as familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, and writing up the results—the researcher can provide a rich, contextualized understanding of how participants navigate the complexities of their teaching contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the experiences, hindering factors, and facilitating factors of teachers working in challenging learning environments.

The following are the key findings of the study:

Teachers frequently encountered learners with diverse abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, behavioral challenges, and motivation levels. Participants reported that this diversity demands constant adaptation of lesson plans, differentiated instruction, and flexible classroom management. Teachers developed resourcefulness, creativity, and empathy to meet students' varied needs. These experiences, while challenging, also serves as a catalyst for professional growth and reflective practice.

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Limited instructional materials, inadequate facilities, and scarce technological tools were consistently reported as major challenges. Teachers often improvised or used personal resources to maintain instructional quality. While these strategies demonstrated resilience and innovation, they also contributed to emotional and financial strain. Resource scarcity highlighted the inequity in educational opportunities and the need for institutional support.

Despite challenges, teachers derived significant personal and professional satisfaction from their work. Witnessing learners' progress, fostering engagement, and seeing students develop confidence and motivation provided a sense of purpose. This fulfillment enhanced emotional resilience, empathy, and commitment to equitable education.

The participants highlighted structural, social, and environmental barriers, including learner absenteeism, hunger, fatigue, overcrowded classes, insufficient materials, limited technology, and low parental involvement. These factors increased teachers' workload and negatively affected instructional quality, engagement, and equity in learning outcomes. Teachers identified several key enablers: Support from colleagues and school leadership – collaboration, shared resources, and encouragement strengthened teacher capacity; Positive teacher-student relationships – trust, rapport, and understanding fostered learner engagement; Parental and community involvement – communication, support, and collaboration extended learning beyond the classroom; and Professional development and flexible teaching strategies – trainings, differentiated instruction, and adaptive methods enhanced effectiveness in diverse and resource-constrained

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CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following insights were drawn:

The study underscores the critical role of flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness in managing learner diversity. Teachers' ability to adjust strategies to meet students' cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural needs is essential in challenging learning environments.

Limited access to materials and technology compels teachers to improvise, highlighting their dedication. However, this also increases stress, emotional labor, and reliance on personal finances, which can affect sustainability.

Strong teacher-student relationships, collaborative professional networks, and community engagement were significant in buffering the negative effects of external constraints. These relational factors enhance learner motivation, teacher morale, and overall classroom functioning.

Challenging environments, while demanding, provide opportunities for teachers to develop resilience, empathy, and reflective practices. Teachers gain a sense of fulfillment and purpose, suggesting that adversity can contribute to professional identity formation and long-term commitment.

Teacher efforts are often constrained by structural limitations. Effective interventions require support from school leadership, policy-level programs, adequate resources, and professional development opportunities to ensure equitable access to quality education.

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