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FOREWORD

Research publication is a major form of Research dissemination. University research culture can be further fostered through research publication. Hence, graduate school students are encouraged to publish their scholarly works through reputable peer-reviewed journals.

The Summit, the official journal of the University of the Assumption (UA), publishes doctorate dissertations and masters' theses. It is composed of editors who carefully select written manuscripts using standards in research in its issues. Its published annual issue showcases the best research outputs for the duration of the whole year.

The 18th (2024) issue of "The Summit" is a compilation of one doctoral dissertation and four masters' theses. These papers were first defended in front of esteemed panelists prior to submission as final requirement for the graduate school degree. In response to the challenge of publishing quality researches, "The Summit", with pride and joy, presents the following studies:

How elementary school heads strive to alleviate learning poverty is the dissertation of Avijel I. Barro for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, major in Educational Management. This qualitative research described the participant school heads' perspectives, observations, and experiences of learning poverty among the pupils concerning implementing their respective learning recovery plans.

I survived! Challenges, coping mechanisms and realizations of novice preschool teachers is the thesis of Maricar Lucia S. Limin for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, major in Early Childhood. This study investigated the challenges, coping mechanisms, strategies, and realizations of novice preschool teachers in the Division of Pampanga.

The mediating effect of grit on the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy among preschool teachers is the thesis of Monica Anne S. Mercado for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, major in Early Childhood. This study investigates how grit mediates the relationship between teachers' perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy.

Assessing the sixth graders' achievement of the learning competencies in English: A test development and validation study is the thesis of Estrella K. Mateo for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, major in English. The primary objective of this study is to develop a standardized English assessment tool for sixth-grade students.

"Exploring public secondary school administrators' practices and teachers' Perspectives and experiences in the new normal classroom observation": Inputs for enhancing instructional leadership is the thesis of Lanamhae M. Cuevas for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, major in Educational Management. This study investigates the practices of public secondary school administrators and the perspectives and experiences of teachers regarding classroom observation in the context of the new normal.

The SUMMIT is the Graduate School Journal of the University of the Assumption published annually. It contains full texts of completed and successfully defended theses and dissertations in the UA Graduate School.

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How elementary school heads strive to alleviate learning poverty

Avijel I. Barro

Doctor of Philosophy, major in Educational Management

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in school closures and disruptions in learning, which have exacerbated the existing problem of learning poverty, wherein an alarming percentage of children lack basic skills in reading that could hinder their ability to learn and succeed in life. Using the qualitative research method, the study described the participant school heads' perspectives, observations, and experiences of learning poverty among the pupils concerning implementing their respective learning recovery plans. It also identified aspects of the learning recovery plans that could be improved. Ten school heads were purposively selected, and thematic analysis was used to determine seven emerging themes that provide description and meaning to experiences related to what school leaders did to address learning poverty. These themes include measuring the gap, tracing the path toward recovery, cultivating a unified force, strengthening the pillar, reaping the fruits of labor, learning from success, and intensifying differentiation. Themes on the changes and modifications in LRP to help learners achieve the expected competencies include time is essential in learning recovery, assessment of learning, strengthened partnership, and meaningful educational initiatives. Recommendations include improving access to quality education, focusing on data-driven planning, engaging parents and communities, establishing a collaborative network, monitoring learning progress, evaluating the learning recovery plans, upskilling in designing differentiated LRPs, and conducting further research studies.

Keywords: *Interventions, learning poverty, learning recovery, qualitative method*

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General affirmed on January 30, 2020, the highest level of alarm on the coronavirus outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). Everybody was surprised as countries were advised to close borders, shut down most economic activities, and even shut schools and place the schoolchildren in their homes.

In North America, the sudden transition to remote learning during the pandemic exposed the digital divide, as low-income students struggled to access the technology required for online education (Reich, 2020). Reich (2020) explains that these disparities in access to digital resources have exacerbated existing educational inequality. In addition, the pandemic resulted in a decline in students' mental health due to elevated levels of tension and anxiety associated with distance learning and social isolation (Dorn et al., 2020). Kuhfeld et al. (2020) found that students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experienced significant learning losses due to school closures, with the most pronounced losses in mathematics. Finland's education system, for instance, adapted rapidly to the situation by relying on a robust digital infrastructure, teacher autonomy, and a supportive government (Kaden, 2020). However, the response was delayed and

less effective in countries such as Italy and Spain due to technological obstacles and inadequate teacher preparation (Kaden, 2020). In the United Kingdom, Andrews et al. (2020) found that the learning gap between socioeconomically advantaged and disadvantaged students increased by 46% during the pandemic.

The pandemic revealed Africa's digital divide, with urban pupils having greater access to distance learning than their rural counterparts (Chawinga & Zozie, 2020). In addition, the pandemic aggravated the pre-existing problems of overcrowded classrooms, teacher deficits, and insufficient learning materials (Chawinga & Zozie, 2020). The situation was particularly dire for girls, who faced an increased risk of dropping out of school due to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2020). Meanwhile, in South America, the pandemic also highlighted and magnified existing educational inequalities, with disadvantaged students experiencing more significant learning losses than their advantaged peers (Azevedo et al., 2020). In countries such as Brazil, the public education system was already under pressure due to limited resources and infrastructure (De Oliveira & Santos, 2020). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds faced significant barriers to accessing online education because of the abrupt transition to distance education (De Oliveira & Santos, 2020).

In Asia, the pandemic had varied effects on educational systems. (Zhang et al., 2020) The Chinese government took decisive action to take education online, leveraging the country's advanced digital infrastructure. Because of this transition, teachers struggled to maintain pupil engagement and adapt to the new format (Zhang et al., 2020). In contrast, India confronted significant obstacles in transitioning to remote learning due to a lack of digital infrastructure and widespread poverty, resulting in concerns about widening educational disparities (Srivastava et al., 2020). In India, the shift to remote learning heightened existing inequalities due to limited access to technology and digital resources, particularly for rural students and low-income households (Srivastava et al., 2020).

Several works of literature have been written to describe the extent of the effects of the pandemic on the educational landscape, and in his book (Reimers, 2020) said that the shift toward remote learning, a significant theme throughout the book, has both positive and negative consequences. Edeh et al. (2020) investigated the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on global education. Coe et al. (2020) examined the effect of school closures on the achievement disparity in the United Kingdom.

Empirical evidence on the impact of COVID-19-related school closures on academic achievement began to emerge. One study conducted during the pandemic revealed a wide learning gap. Students' average reading scores decreased compared to previous years, indicating a decline in reading achievement. The study also revealed that the decline in reading achievement was more pronounced among younger and lower-income pupils, suggesting that the pandemic added to existing educational disparities (Kuhfeld et al., 2021). Also, Hammerstein, Konig, Dreisoerner and Frey (2021) conducted a systematic literature review to determine the effects of school closures on student achievement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Africa, Angrist et al. (2021) discussed learning poverty and the effects of COVID-19 on education in Africa. Asian schools similarly have experienced different problems related to the closure of the schools. Jiang et al. (2021) studied the levels of depression, anxiety, and tension among higher education students in four Asia-Pacific countries (China, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quality education is a pillar of national development in the Philippines. The Philippine Constitution of 1987 guarantees the right to a high-quality fundamental education. Poverty is the most vital determinant of access to quality education (Maligalig et al., 2010).

Moreover, the 2019 Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) show that the Grade 5 Filipino student's average score in the Reading Literacy assessment was 288 points, subsiding under Band 3 of the regional proficiency scale in the 2019 SEA-PLM. This shows that ordinary Grade 5 Filipino students could read text fluently and start to employ their meaning.

On the contrary, about 1% of Filipino Grade 5 students were projected to fit into the highest proficiency band. This reveals that very few Filipino Grade 5 students can transcribe consistent texts with complete ideas and a good choice of appropriate vocabulary.

Studies have been conducted to assess the effects of school closure on the teaching and learning process. Dela Cruz and Cacanindin (2020) examined the difficulties and adjustments tertiary education teachers encountered during the pandemic. Tria et al. (2020) investigated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in the Philippines, concentrating on the difficulties faced by students, teachers, and institutions as they adapted to the new norm.

Studies have also shown the effects of the shift to distance learning on parents. Agaton and Cueto (2021) investigated the lived experiences of Filipino parents navigating distance learning with their children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, Saavedra, Global Director for Education at the World Bank, said the COVID-19 problem stopped the world's education systems.

These learning gaps are very alarming. One response to the phenomenon was a study by The World Bank titled "Learning Recovery after COVID-19 in Europe and Central Asia: Policy and Practice," which seeks to shed light on the effects of the pandemic on learning outcomes and education systems in the region. Angrist et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of confronting learning poverty and prioritizing learning recovery during the pandemic.

The four pillars of the learning recovery plan include (1) K to 12 Curriculum: Quality of Learning Outcomes and Learning Delivery Modalities (2) Support to the Learning Environment: Access, Equity, and Inclusion in Education, (3) Upskilling and Reskilling of Personnel: Quality of Teachers, School Heads and Supervisors and (4) Engagement of Stakeholders for Support and Collaboration: Responsive Engagement for Education.

Through an extensive literature review on the international to national contexts of learning recovery strategies, the study intends to explore elementary school heads' perspectives, experiences, and practices in addressing the "learning poverty" discovered in their respective elementary schools. It aims to systematically document the experiences of the school heads on the

strategies initiated by the schools from pre-, implementation, and post-implementation phases to address learning poverty and accelerate learning through phenomenological reduction approaches based on the proposed method of phenomenological interviewing (Bevan, 2014).

The study's overarching objective is to derive inputs for instructional improvement to alleviate learning poverty among elementary school pupils drawn from the perspectives, observations, and experiences of the participant School Heads in implementing their Learning Recovery Plans. To accomplish this, the study specifically sought to: (1) describe the participant school heads' perspectives, observations, and experiences of learning poverty among the pupils concerning the implementation and assessment of their respective learning recovery plans; and (2) identify things that may be changed or modified in the learning recovery plan to help the learners achieve the expected competencies.

METHOD

This research utilized qualitative methods through in-depth interviews as the primary data-gathering scheme to explore the participants' experiences, attitudes, and practices. It explicitly used a basic interpretive design that seeks to understand individuals' or groups' subjective experiences and perspectives (Willig, 2017).

The study employed Collaizi's (1978) method of data analysis to reveal emergent themes and their interwoven relationships. It also utilized the MAXQDA software in analyzing the responses of the participants.

The study's participants are the ten (10) elementary public-School Heads of elementary and integrated schools with high learning poverty in the Locale of the Study. There are three (3) criteria for the inclusion of participants. The participants of the study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Participating schools

School	Reading Comprehension		Rate of Non-Readers and Frustration Readers
	Non-Reader	Frustration Reader	
1. Elementary School 1	37.11%	37.11%	74.22%
2. Elementary School 2	12.12%	56.06%	68.18%
3. Elementary School 3	6.12%	58.16%	64.28%
4. Integrated School 4	0	64.18%	64.18%
5. Integrated School 5	8.35%	49.30%	57.65%
6. Integrated School 6	22.24%	34.49%	56.73%
7. Integrated School 7	10.10%	46.46%	56.56%

School	Reading Comprehension		Rate of Non-Readers and Frustration Readers
	Non-Reader	Frustration Reader	
8. Integrated School 8	22.28%	32.88%	55.16%
9. Integrated School 9	14.29%	40.14%	54.43%
10. Elementary School 10	6.12%	45.92%	52.04%

The study ensured that no ethical standards were violated while holding the interview. The Data Protection Act of 1988 was followed in collecting and managing the participants' data. The data obtained was used for academic purposes, and participant confidentiality was maintained.

Purposive sampling was used in this study's non-parametric strategy to select the target individuals. A select group of participants must meet the characteristics needed to collect data and achieve study objectives (Crossman, 2020).

For the data collection to flow smoothly, the following directions were observed: (1) The participants were briefed about the study's voluntary participation. They were given options whether they wanted to be involved in the study or not. (2) Permission for the interviews to be audio recorded was sought from all the participants, and everybody was given the consent form before the interview. (3) The data collection procedure adhered to transparency; as an outcome, the participants were provided guidelines for the interview. (4) The participants were interviewed individually in a quiet private room. Organized and planned one-to-one interviews were applied to extract comprehensive information from the participants. (5) The audio recorder was utilized during the interviews to record what is being said fully and precisely.

The study's qualitative data collection was examined using theoretical thematic analysis. The saturation threshold was reached when no novel insights or concepts were raised during the interview. It concerned that all the participants' thoughts and opinions could be expressed.

This study carefully studied the recorded data before beginning data analysis. The information was then classified into codes based on assessing the similarities and differences between the thoughts. The acquired qualitative data was supported by documentary analysis as a validation method. Likewise, the MAXQDA software was utilized for coding and analyzing the participants' responses.

In the conduct of the study, all protocols were thoroughly observed. The participants were unidentified. In the concealment of the data, it was kept and protected in Google Drive's personal computer to protect the gathered data. It would be kept back for three (3) years.

The study made a semi-structured interview guide to gather information from the ten participants. The three experts evaluated it to ensure that it followed sound grammatical construction and language accuracy.

Table 2 presents the experts' evaluation of the constructed interview questions addressing the research objectives. With 50% as a passing score, it obtained an overall rating of 99.07%. The alignment of the interview questions to the research objectives garnered 100%.

Table 2

Evaluation of experts on the interview questions in relation to research objectives, grammatical soundness and language accuracy

Research Question	Alignment of the interview question to the research objective				Grammatical Soundness				Language Accuracy			
	E 1	E 2	E 3	S T	E 1	E 2	E 3	S T	E 1	E 2	E 3	S T
How do you describe the extent of learning poverty in your respective school?	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	2	3	8
What are your learning experiences, challenges/ difficulties, and joy in addressing the discovered “learning poverty” among your learners through implementing a learning recovery plan?	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9
What area or part of your learning recovery plan has helped reduce learning poverty? Kindly describe how your program addressed learning poverty or at least part of the problems.	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9
What may be changed or modified in the learning recovery plan to help learners achieve the expected outcomes?	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9	3	3	3	9
	Sub-Total			36	Sub-Total			36	Sub-Total			35
TOTAL									107			
RATING									99.07%			
INTERPRETATION									PASSED			

Research Objective: Describe the participant school head’s perspectives, observations, and experiences on learning poverty among the pupils concerning the implementation of their respective learning recovery plans

FINDINGS

Experiences in the Implementation and Assessment of the Learning Recovery Plans

Table 3 shows four (4) significant contexts that would describe the actions done by the school heads in addressing learning poverty through their learning recovery plans.

Table 3

Overview of the emerging themes on implementing the learning recovery plans

Emerging Theme	Context	n
Measuring the Gap	Low performance	14
	Nonreaders	6
	Frustration readers	6
Tracing the Path toward Learning Recovery	Parent support	11
	Resources	8
	motivation	3
Cultivating a unified Workforce	Working with parents	6
	Working with teachers	9
Strengthening the Pillar	Best Practices	11

Measuring the Gap. Learning poverty is a term used to describe children's lack of basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills, which hinders their ability to learn and succeed in life. The participating school heads had seen firsthand the learning poverty in their respective schools.

Cultivating a Unified Workforce. Though the participants believed that the path toward learning recovery was long and arduous, the program would not be successful without the help of the parents. Furthermore, the participants also recognized teachers' roles in the learning recovery plan's success.

Strengthening the Pillar. The participants boasted about their projects and interventions that serve as pillars of their learning recovery plans. It was noted that to reduce learning poverty, they are '*encouraged to provide equitable inclusive and quality based basic education for all the learners through recovery initiatives in language, numeracy, and academic competency*'.

Assessing the Learning Recovery Plans

Table 4 shows (3) meaningful contexts that would describe the actions done by the school heads in addressing learning poverty through their learning recovery plans.

Table 4*Overview of the emerging themes on assessing the learning recovery plans*

Emerging Theme	Context	n
Reaping the Fruits of Labor	Fulfillment	13
	Frustration	4
Learning from Success	Enhancing LRP	4
	Strengthening partnership	2
	Adjusting timeframe	3
	Continuous improvement	8
Intensifying Differentiation	Differentiation	8
	Localized programs	2

Reaping the Fruits of Labor. The participants recognized the challenges that would come to address the learning poverty in the country. Yet, after that long initial journey toward learning recovery, the participants were, little by little, learning the hard-earned fruits of their good labor.

Learning from Success. They say that experience is a great teacher. Thus, experiencing failure could be a harsh mentor, but the lessons learned are deeply engraved. However, stories of success and triumphs could have also been discovered.

Intensifying Differentiation. One issue that the participants have mostly discussed is improving the learning recovery plans in response to the needs of the learners. There is a need to develop the recovery plan more intensively so that it could be appropriate to the different needs of the children because the needs of the students “change every day”.

Changes or Modifications in the Learning Recovery Plan to Help Learners Achieve Expected Competencies

The learning recovery plan aims to assist learners and teachers in regaining any ground in their education that may have been forgotten or interrupted due to various circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, or the use of remote learning. In the course of its implementation, assessment paved the way for the schools to come up with changes and modifications to ensure the achievement of learning objectives.

Extending Time for Recovery. Allotting recovery time to recuperate from the learning losses is essential to bounce back, regain what was lost, and fully recover from the failure. Time is indeed necessary for learning recovery.

Assessing Learners Regularly. For a few reasons, learning assessment is crucial to the educational process, especially in learning recovery. Assessment is used to gauge how much a learner has retained and how much of the recovery program's learning objectives have been met.

Strengthening Partnership. For learning recovery to be successful, partnerships must be maintained since these can assist in pooling resources, expertise, and support to better meet the needs of struggling learners. A variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community groups, and governmental organizations, can be included in partnerships.

Conducting Meaningful Educational Initiatives. Since these can help address the learning gaps and obstacles that learners may have experienced because of the disruptions created by the COVID-19 epidemic or other factors, meaningful educational activities are crucial for learning recovery. Learners with trouble in particular subject areas or who have fallen behind because of the epidemic can receive direct support from meaningful educational programs.

DISCUSSION

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has been well-documented in previous studies. A World Bank (2020) study found that school closures and disruptions in learning due to the pandemic have worsened learning poverty, particularly for disadvantaged learners in low-income countries.

The first theme identified by the study was "Measuring the gap," which pertains to the first action done by the school heads before implementing the learning recovery plans. Interestingly, the high percentage of non-readers and frustrated readers among the participating schools is consistent with other studies that have found low literacy and numeracy levels among children in developing countries (Abadzi, 2006; Wagner et al., 2016).

Addressing learning poverty is crucial to promoting equitable and inclusive education and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. As noted by UNESCO (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the urgency of addressing learning poverty, particularly in low-income countries with limited access to quality education. Children who do not develop basic literacy and numeracy abilities will have fewer prospects as adults (World Bank, 2021), reinforcing the cycle of poverty and inequality.

The second theme was named "Tracing the path toward learning recovery," which pertains to the principals' actions in identifying the challenges that may be encountered in implementing the learning recovery plan. According to Balasundran et al. (2021), various aspects of teaching are affected by the Covid-19 epidemic, which impacts teachers' motivation and job satisfaction, particularly those working from home. Some teachers had trouble switching back to in-person instruction since they had grown This accords with the findings of Julius and Evans (2015) on the relationship between study habits and students' academic achievement.

This can be attributed to the disruption caused by the pandemic, which led to a shift in the learning modality and affected the engagement and performance of students. This statement is also true regarding the study conducted by Miciak et al., (2018) which involved 484 fourth graders with severe reading problems. Likewise, Morgan (2022) explored other pressing concerns that contributed to the worsening learning losses during and after the pandemic, highlighting the lack of resources as a significant dilemma.

The learning recovery plan's implementation is also hampered by the lack of time to implement the interventions and the lack of remedial classroom space. The curriculum is too saturated; teaching poorly mastered competencies simultaneously with the required curriculum plan and topics requires an abundance of time (Angrist et al., 2021). According to Lassa, Petal and Surjan (2022), natural disasters are not just the sole causes of the lack of school facilities, but even this world health crisis caused a lack of classrooms because of the need to conduct activities and projects intended to accelerate learning recoveries.

The lack of parental support is arguably the biggest challenge educational leaders must overcome to effectively implement the learning recovery plan. According to Paul, Rashmi and Srivastava (2021), a lack of parental support will affect learners' academic performance and lead to school dropouts. However, these challenges could not be considered new as previous studies have highlighted the difficulties of teacher motivation, student motivation, and parental engagement in addressing learning gaps (Lavy & Sand, 2021; Park et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2021).

The third theme identified by the study was "cultivating a unified workforce," which pertains to the actions of the school principals in gathering the support of both parents and teachers to implement the learning recovery plans. Teachers are considered vital actors in addressing learning poverty, and it is recognized that collaboration and teamwork among school heads, teachers, learners, and families can help build relationships and strengthen the school community (Castañeda, 2021; Espino, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Specifically, all teachers, not just English and Filipino teachers, must be involved in addressing reading problems (Espino, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

Strengthening the partnership between parents and teachers is crucial in addressing learning poverty (Espino, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Moreover, the importance of parents in tackling learning poverty is also acknowledged because children's academic achievement is significantly impacted by parental involvement in their education, according to a study (González-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2020). Particularly, parental encouragement of reading is necessary to keep kids from falling behind in school (Castañeda, 2021). To increase their involvement in their children's education, parents must be informed about the value of reading (Castañeda, 2021; González-DeHass et al., 2020), and the involvement of parents is crucial to the success of learning recovery programs (Fletcher et al., 2020). Parents must be educated on the importance of reading and be encouraged to participate in their children's learning activities (Fletcher et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

The fourth theme was "Strengthening the Pillar," which pertains to the actions done by the school principals in designing and implementing the learning recovery plans. Developing interventions to address learning poverty is crucial in improving educational outcomes for children, and such programs can improve school readiness and academic performance, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Fink et al., 2020).

The fifth theme was “Reaping the Fruits of Labor,” which generally pertains to the principals' actions in determining the outcomes of the implemented learning recovery plans. McLaughlin & Adams (2020) and Rahman (2020) shared a sense of fulfillment among school leaders when they saw the positive changes in their student's academic performance. When leaders foster a supportive and collaborative school environment, they are more likely to feel fulfilled in their work (Sawchuk, 2021).

The sixth theme was “Learning from success,” which pertains to the school principals' actions in determining possible improvement areas in the learning recovery plan. Various studies have also found how addressing the learning gaps can improve the learners' academic performance, such as that of Nguyen et al. (2021) and Hill et al. (2020). Similarly, even interventions addressing the social and emotional skills of learners were found to improve the performance of learners inside the school and improve their behaviors (McLeod et al., 2021). However, these also had adverse effects as these interventions could lead to stigmatization and low self-esteem among those learners identified as struggling (Rojas et al., 2021). If not properly implemented, these interventions could lead to student disengagement and even resistance (Freeman & Simonsen, 2020).

The last theme was named “Intensifying differentiation,” which pertains to the school principal's actions in planning for the next revision and implementation of the learning recovery plans. A one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective in addressing students' diverse learning needs, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Nguyen et al., 2021). Therefore, addressing learning poverty requires a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing the underlying social and economic issues contributing to the problem (Hill et al., 2020).

In general, learning poverty, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is a severe issue of education that needs to be addressed to promote equitable and inclusive education and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Philippine Department of Education has developed a Learning Recovery Plan that includes diagnostic assessments, remedial programs, flexible learning modalities, bridging programs, and professional development to assist learners who have experienced learning losses during the pandemic.

Extending Time for Recovery. Devoting particular time for teachers to assist learners in mastering basic competencies must be improved as one of the modifications in the implementation of learning recovery plan. Recognizing that development might not happen right away and might call for given that we presume that all the time that might be spent studying is, in fact, being utilized for learning, the real amount of time that is being wasted is very certainly significantly more (Novicoff & Kraft, 2022).

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial elements in assessing learners regularly. Monitoring is continuous observation and data gathering to track advancement toward learning objectives while undergoing a recovery program in reading. Evaluation entails thoroughly examining an intervention or learning recovery program.

The global epidemic caused by COVID-19 has gravely impacted education. It is still the top goal worldwide to guarantee that every child is supported throughout this crisis so that they may attend school again and make up for whatever educational ground they may have missed. These actions are the RAPID: Reach every kid and keep them enrolled in school; determine each child's current level of academic achievement; place emphasis on teaching

the basics of a subject; speed up the process of regaining academic ground; and ensure that every child's mental and emotional health is optimal so that they are always prepared to study (Chanduvi et al., 2022).

Strengthening partnerships is essential for learning recovery because it can greatly help pool resources, knowledge, and assistance to better meet the requirements of learners with trouble learning. Community collaborations and strengthened partnerships open up new avenues of financing, allow for the sharing of resources, and use volunteers who have received training via various service programs (Carvalho et al., 2020).

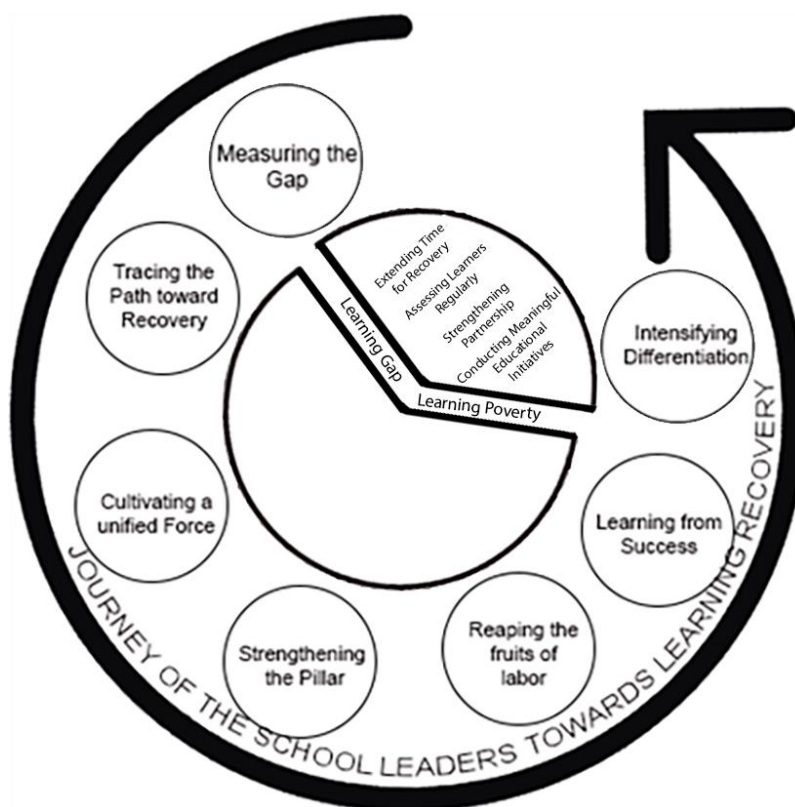
Partnerships have been crucial in providing financial support and technical help; the facilitation of research, data gathering, and analytics; the support of project implementation and delivery; the support of project implementation and delivery; the coordination of multiple response activities; and so on. A significant contribution to the formation of partnerships is being made by the United Nations, as well as by civil society and the commercial sector.

Key success criteria include having a clear vision, trust among stakeholders, aligned interests, being flexible and committed, and having adaptable governance structures and leadership. However, there are also significant obstacles to overcome, such as poor communication between partners, limited access to resources, and uncertainty brought on by the continuously shifting environmental circumstances. There is a need to rethink procedures deemed necessary for formalizing partnerships (UN DESA, 2021).

Conducting meaningful educational initiatives can focus on learners' social-emotional, academic, and overall well-being in addition to academic abilities. This can facilitate learning recovery by lowering stress and anxiety and fostering a happy learning environment. To make schools better through educational initiatives, it is necessary to have both successful educational initiatives and the expertise of how to put those strategies into action in schools (Bryk, 2015).

The study was able to determine the actions taken by school leaders in addressing learning poverty in their respective schools. The first step taken by the school heads was to define the learning poverty among their students through diagnostic assessments. Most of the learners had very low skills in basic reading. This huge learning gap was alarming, and the school leaders were determined to address this issue using their learning recovery plans which provided learning interventions that could address problems with specific competencies. However, implementing the learning recovery plan was found to be a long and winding road. There are several challenges which include learner engagement, parental support, and resources. Among the components under resources, time was found to be of high scarcity leaving the school with lesser opportunities to implement their interventions.

Figure 1 shows the symbolic representation of the journey of school leaders in addressing learning poverty.

Figure 1*Symbolic Representation of the Study*

Despite these challenges, however, the school leaders were determined to implement their learning interventions. To attain greater success, the school leaders worked with their teachers and with the parents.

The study could provide data needed for the success of the MATATAG agenda of the Department of Education. The current administration's proposed MATATAG Agenda seeks to resolve various issues in the education sector, including the country's learning gaps.

In addition, the MATATAG Agenda emphasizes the importance of caring for students by promoting their well-being, inclusive education, and a positive learning environment. This entails establishing a safe and supportive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of students and promotes their overall development.

The study further highlights the dynamic role of educational administrators in providing quality education. Leaders should not be reactive but should always be proactive, envisioning a future where students have grown into productive members of the citizens while preparing for any obstacle that will come along the way.

Pillar 1: K to 12 Curriculum: Quality of Learning Outcomes and Learning Delivery Modalities

The student's performance in a range of courses and competencies serves as a gauge of the effectiveness of the learning outcomes in the K–12 curriculum. The Department of Education (DepEd) has created performance criteria for each subject and level that indicate how well students are learning.

Pillar 2: Support to the Learning Environment: Access, Equity, and Inclusion in Education

The themes under the second pillar are *Cultivating a Unified Workforce and Tracing the Path Toward Learning Recovery and Extending Time for Recovery*. Implementing the learning recovery plans involves having lofty goals and putting up a significant effort to realize them and devoting time to assist learners who experience difficulties.

Pillar 3: Upskilling and Reskilling of Personnel: Quality of Teachers, School Heads, and Supervisors

Upskilling and reskilling personnel to produce quality teachers, school heads and supervisors include themes such as *Tracing the Path toward Learning Recovery and Learning from Success*. Positive change does not happen overnight, thus, producing quality DepEd personnel is a process and takes time in a gradual manner.

Pillar 4: Engagement of Stakeholders for Support and Collaboration: Responsive Engagement for Education

Themes such as *Cultivating a Unified Workforce*, *The Winding Path toward Learning*, and *Learning from Success*, and *Strengthening Partnership* supported this pillar. Engaging stakeholders for support and collaboration will never be easy for schools. Salient parts of the tool include the contextualized activity, project, or program of the school anchored on a particular pillar.

The study was able to describe the participant school heads' perspectives, observations, and experiences of learning poverty among the pupils concerning implementing their respective learning recovery plans and identify things that may be changed or modified in the learning to help the learners achieve the expected competencies. The study thus presents several implications for educational management.

The first theme implies the need for continuous assessment of students' learning performance. Educational managers should utilize diagnostic assessments to identify learning gaps and understand the specific needs of students.

The second theme of the study highlights the need for data-driven decisions in addressing the learning gap. Data-driven decision-making involves using data to inform and guide educational practices and policies.

The third theme of the study highlights the importance of having an ambitious and determined approach to educational management in addressing learning poverty. It emphasizes the need for school leaders to push through challenges and obstacles to implement effective learning recovery plans.

The fourth theme stresses the importance of developing and implementing various interventions to address learning poverty. This theme underscores the role of school leaders, parents, and teachers in working collaboratively toward improving educational outcomes for children.

The fifth theme emphasizes the need for monitoring. Monitoring is an essential aspect of educational management in addressing learning poverty. The success of any intervention program depends on how effectively it is monitored and evaluated.

In summary, monitoring is an essential aspect of educational management in addressing learning poverty. It identifies areas of strength and weakness in intervention programs and enables the refinement and improvement of the program over time.

The sixth theme emphasizes the need to review and revise the learning recovery plans. This theme focuses on the need to improve learning recovery plans continuously. The success of any intervention in addressing learning poverty depends on its effectiveness in addressing the specific learning gaps of students.

Finally, the last theme of the study emphasizes the need for developing learning recovery plans that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of the learners. Intensifying differentiation in addressing learning gaps is an approach that aims to personalize and tailor interventions to meet the specific needs of individual learners.

The study's overarching objective is to derive inputs for instructional improvement to alleviate learning poverty among elementary school pupils drawn from the perspectives, observations, and experiences of the participant School Heads in implementing their Learning Recovery Plans.

Conclusions

The first step taken by the school heads was to define the learning poverty among their students through diagnostic assessments. The results were truly disappointing as most learners had very low basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills. This huge learning gap was alarming, and the school leaders were determined to address this issue using their learning recovery plans which provided learning interventions that could address problems with specific competencies.

Despite these challenges, the school leaders were determined to aim for the moon and implement their learning interventions. To attain greater success, the school leaders worked with their teachers and with the parents. Different activities were developed, and action plans were implemented.

The study further highlights the dynamic role of educational administrators in providing quality education. Leaders should not be reactive but should always be proactive, envisioning a future where students have grown into productive members of the citizens while preparing for any obstacle that will come along the way.

Recommendations

1. Improve access to quality education. Efforts should be made to improve access to quality education, especially for disadvantaged learners. This can be achieved through investments in infrastructure, teacher training, and the provision of learning materials and technology. School administrators could work with the local government leaders so that support systems can be designed and provided for families with low resources to sustain the educational needs of the learners. School administrators should also consult with upper

management to discuss conflicting policy guidelines to implement interventions with no problem appropriately.

2. Focus on data-driven planning: Data-driven planning is a recommended approach to addressing learning poverty, as it allows educators and school leaders to make informed decisions based on accurate and relevant data. School leaders should work with all stakeholders to determine all aspects that affect or could affect the success of the implementation of the learning recovery plans.

3. Engage parents and communities: Parental and community engagement is crucial in addressing learning poverty. School leaders could also allot resources and support to parents and members of the communities so that they could help the learners at home or in the community. Through training and other support, parents should be empowered to assist in implementing the learning recovery plans. School leaders should also discuss with the local government units, specifically the barangay leaders, the recovery plan of the schools so that community members could also encourage parents and learners to participate in the program.

4. Establish a collaborative network: School leaders and teachers in the division could build a forum where they can come together to discuss their experiences and strategies for addressing learning loss. This could include regular virtual meetings, workshops, or conferences where teachers and school leaders can share their successes, challenges, and ideas for effective learning interventions.

5. Monitor Learning progress: Monitoring the learning progress allows educators to identify areas where students are struggling and to adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. By regularly monitoring progress, educators can also determine the effectiveness of their interventions and make necessary adjustments to ensure that students are achieving the intended learning outcomes. The school leaders could provide stricter guidelines on the assessment procedures and stronger, more valid, and more reliable instruments to assess the results.

6. Evaluating the Learning Recovery Plans. As schools continue to navigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic, school leaders need to review and evaluate their learning recovery plans regularly. By doing so, they can identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to ensure that the interventions effectively address the learning gaps.

7. Upskilling in Designing Differentiated LRPs. School leaders who are knowledgeable in this crafting differentiated LRPs can design targeted interventions that address the specific learning gaps of their students. Professional development programs and workshops can be organized to enhance their knowledge and skills in designing and implementing differentiated learning recovery programs.

8. Conduct further research studies. Implementing the learning recovery plan covers a lot of contexts and areas that need to be closely monitored. Future researchers could focus on different variables not covered by the study. Quantitative approaches to research could also be implemented to seek the general status of implementing the learning recovery plans.

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I survived! Challenges, coping mechanisms and realizations of novice preschool teachers

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Abstract

This study investigated the challenges, coping mechanisms, strategies, and realizations of novice preschool teachers in the Division of Pampanga during School Year 2023–2024. Employing a case study design, five teachers participated through open-ended questionnaires and follow-up interviews, with responses clustered into thematic categories. Findings revealed persistent challenges in fostering pupil collaboration, addressing diverse learner needs, and integrating technology amid limited ICT resources and poor internet connectivity. Coping strategies included play-based learning, establishing simple rules for discipline, and employing multimedia tools to enhance instruction. Teachers emphasized inclusive practices that ensure pupils feel secure and valued. Realizations underscored that teaching requires patience, resilience, and continuous learning, yet remains deeply fulfilling. The study recommends targeted interventions such as seminars on collaborative learning, technical support for ICT integration, and mentorship programs to strengthen novice teachers' professional development. These initiatives contribute to sustainable early childhood education and institutional capacity-building.

Keywords: *Case study, challenges, coping mechanisms, novice preschool teachers, realizations*

INTRODUCTION

For many years, researchers have debated the importance of quality education in influencing pupils' intellectual and personal progress. Early childhood education embraces statistics, as well as the idea that children begin learning the day they are born. As a result, a child's early experiences are crucial to their long-term development and health. Between birth and the age of eight, the brain develops at the fastest rate, making early schooling critical to a child's future (Goodwin University, 2019).

Teachers play an important role in the development of young children, especially those who are at developmental risk owing to variables such as poverty and poor childhood experiences (Kwon, 2019). Although it may appear obvious that an excellent early childhood workforce is made up of competent, healthy, happy, and committed teachers, there has been remarkably little study on teacher well-being, particularly the physical aspects, and what types of workplace assistance can improve it (Kwon, 2019).

The early years of teaching are a period of intensive transition as new instructors assume the responsibilities of planning instruction, instructing, assessing pupils, and managing a classroom while also confronted with "incompatible notions of the best means by which to teach" (Smagorinsky, Shelton & Moore, 2015). As stated by Fecho, Stewart and Hawley (2020), inexperienced teachers can become upset when their pedagogical goals and instructional surroundings collide.

Given that beginner teachers often see their first years on the job as the most difficult and demanding of their careers. Novice teachers, those at the beginning of their careers with three or fewer years of experience, frequently face a mismatch between what they studied in pre-service education and the realities of school policies and cultures (Brown et al., 2021). A growing proportion of ECE teachers are obliged to employ highly structured commercial curricula, which could worsen the mismatch (Evans, Lester & Broemmel, 2010; Holt, 2021).

According to research, beginner teachers have different problems in the classroom than experienced teachers (Chaaban & Du, 2017). Daily, a preschool teacher encounters various new and unique problems. They frequently struggle with developing the correct curriculum, dealing with the many requirements of children at the same time, and conveying little details about the children to the parents.

A successful connection between teachers and parents is essential to the academic success of preschool pupils (van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Such a connection refers to a partnership in which parents and teachers work together in a variety of ways to ensure the success of the pupils across all academic and social settings; yet research shows this connection is often difficult to create and maintain (Grant & Ray, 2013). Teachers served as the crucial link between policy and practice, institution and community, and families and administrators (Epstein, 2013; Duncan, 2015). Educators were assigned the difficult task of being exceptional teachers in the classroom, as well as being extraordinary networkers skilled in engaging families and the communities in which they work and live (Duncan, 2015).

Figure 1
Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTCS)

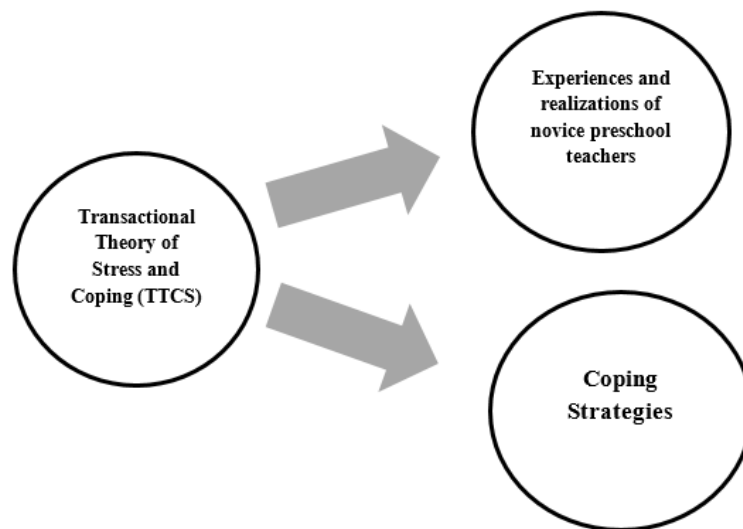


Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study. As can be observed in this framework, this includes the challenges of novice public school teachers. This also contains the coping mechanisms and strategies that these teachers employed.

This study was guided by the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC). According to Biggs, Brough and Drummond (2017), this theory focuses on assessments to evaluate damages, threats, and challenges. This demonstrates how significant experiences in life impact people's emotions. The approach places a heavy emphasis on stress management and cognitive appraisal (coping).

The study determined the challenges faced by novice public school teachers. This focused on preschool teachers' challenges coping mechanisms and strategies, and their realizations about the profession. It is critical to understand what stress is and how research on stress has developed through time to fully comprehend the strength of the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTCS).

Preschool teachers used a variety of acceptable tactics to help create a warm classroom climate in their classes (Pinar, 2020). It is advised that teachers' tactics and punishment approaches for dealing with challenging behaviors be positively improved by enhancing preschool teachers' knowledge, skills, and experiences in the classroom management dimension (Pinar, 2020).

This case study intends to draw issues on teaching and lessons from the experiences and realizations of the participants- novice preschool teachers. The result of this study hopes to contribute to the understanding of the experiences of novice pre-school teachers. It will also give information and contribution to educational management to provide a better experience to novice preschool teachers by proposing a program to address issues concerning their challenges.

Furthermore, the findings will be useful for understanding novice preschool teachers' experiences and will provide essential insights into the challenges they confront, the assistance they need, and the areas where their training can be improved. The findings of the study can assist inform the development of more effective teacher training programs that address the special needs of novice preschool teachers.

Specifically, this study sought to describe the participants': (1) challenges encountered in teaching preschoolers; (2) coping mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties (3) their realizations in their beginning year/s as preschool teachers.

The following research questions were conceptualized to realize the objectives of the case study: (1) What are the novice preschool teachers' challenges encountered in teaching preschoolers? (2) What are the coping mechanisms and strategies used by novice preschool teachers in dressing difficulties? (3) What do teachers realize in their beginning year/s as preschool teachers?

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative research design. It also used a case study approach. A purposive sampling design was used to select the participants of this study. Participants who met the following "criteria" qualified as study participants: they were informed about or had personal experience with the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Table 1
Demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Age	Years of Service	Sex
P1	39 years old	3	Female
P2	36 years old	3	Female
P3	30 years old	1	Female
P4	44 years old	1	Female
P5	32 years old	3	Female

Participants = Novice Preschool Teachers

Inclusion Criteria

Participants of the study were the preschool teachers who are currently in their first year to third year of teaching in public schools in the Division of Pampanga.

Data Gathering Procedure

Semi-structured questionnaires were validated by three authorized and experienced persons. Before the interview, the researcher informed the participants online about the study. Following the online scheduling of the participants' interviews via Google Forms and phone calls, informed consent was sent and distributed electronically following their agreement to participate.

Online one-on-one interview was a method used in gaining insights into people's experiences, panoramas, and understanding of a given phenomenon and could contribute to in-depth data collection (Seidman, 2006).

Ethical Considerations

A permission letter was submitted to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of Pampanga. Upon approval, the letters were forwarded to the school heads of the identified schools. The University of the Assumption Review Ethics Board (UAREB) authorized the study framework as well as the pertinent materials utilized in the study, such as informed consent and interview questions.

Participants were informed about the study's goal and potential health hazards before the interview. It was made available online, along with the consent form once they agreed to participate. Permission was obtained from the participants before the interview. Online one-on-one interviews were utilized. The participants' responses were all recorded. The researcher recorded the conversations that took place during the interview session using a feature of the Google Meet application.

The data were saved electronically in Google Drive on the researcher's computer drive (for backup purposes). The researcher ensured that the data were not accessible to unauthorized people who were not specified in the approved study to ensure the participants' privacy, safety and protection. The researcher sought out volunteers who could provide thorough information about the subject. The participants' availability and schedule were considered; the time/date of the interview was up to them.

Every word said by the participants was considered when transcribing their responses. Any texts written in a different language were translated by a professional. Three (3) backups (Google Drive, PC and flash drive) were planned.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed thematic analysis. To find common themes, topics, concepts, and patterns of meaning that recur, the researcher carefully analyzed the data (Caulfield, 2022).

FINDINGS

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Challenges Encountered in Teaching Preschoolers	Encountered several challenges in teaching preschoolers. This involves promoting social skills, management, and behavior, integrating technology and digital tools, and preschoolers' diversity	Met some challenges in teaching preschoolers. This involves promoting social skills, management, and behavior, integrating technology and digital tools, and preschoolers' diversity.	Encountered several challenges in teaching preschoolers. This involves promoting social skills, management, and behavior, integrating technology and digital tools, and preschoolers' diversity.	Encountered several challenges in teaching preschoolers. This involves promoting social skills, management, and behavior, integrating technology and digital tools, and preschoolers' diversity.	Encountered several challenges in teaching preschoolers. This involves promoting social skills, management, and behavior, integrating technology and digital tools, and preschoolers' diversity.
Promoting Social Skills and Cooperation	Struggles when her pupils feel shy in cooperating with others. Also, the pupils are too shy to say what they like and not.	Struggled in conversing with the pupils. Since they are just preschoolers, they cannot manage to use eye contact and they do not want to take turns.	Struggles when her pupils feel separation anxiety. Also, the pupils are beginning to write and learn the sounds of letters.	Had a hard time making her pupils understand that some of their classmates do have special needs and so they must be comfortable with them and include them in doing group activities.	Challenged when it comes to pupils who find it hard to listen, share and participate with others.
Perceiving and Navigating the Challenges of Maintaining Classroom Management and Discipline	Believes that helping learners to understand their own emotions helps in promoting discipline in the classroom. The feeling of getting guidance from their teacher until they can be	Described that it is challenging to know the interests and limits of the pupils. Being a role model is also a challenge because preschoolers copy everything	Makes sure that every pupils feels belong in her class. Composure is also important whenever pupils have a hard time adjusting in the classroom.	Uses different strategies in maintaining classroom discipline and managing the classroom. She perceives how fulfilling teaching is by thinking that pupils are	Believes that it is important to understand pupils well before making classroom rules. As a teacher, what causes the challenges must be determined.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
	able to do things is also a good practice in maintaining discipline.	that their teachers do.		learning from her.	
Integrating Technology and Digital Tools into Early Childhood Education	Narrated that technology facilitates teaching and learning. It is a tool that encourages preschoolers to follow multi-step directions in activities in the classroom.	Narrated that children in this generation are attentive when teachers integrate technology into the classroom. Integrating technology makes learning more fun since it involves playing.	Described that in this 21st century, the world is in a world of technologies. Pupils learn easily using video lessons.	Makes use both traditional and modern tools. She uses blackboard and televisions at times. She believes that using television is effective, however, she finds the traditional method more challenging nowadays	Narrated that technology has its pros and cons. Technology can be an access to information, fast information processing, and increased capacity.
Preschoolers' Unique Learning Needs and Diverse Backgrounds	Believes that it is important to know learners' needs and interests. Giving them different activities and knowing how they learn individually is a way to cater to their differences.	It is important to know every pupil and to respect their individuality. As a teacher, it is vital to encourage them and facilitate active learning.	Believes that children learn best through play. That way, they get to enjoy while learning.	Uses different activities and materials that are suitable for the child's abilities and skills to accommodate the unique learning needs and diverse backgrounds of the pupils.	Believes that for best academic result, a teacher must promote active learning. Motivating pupils also becomes a challenge as they learn and use their learning for life skills.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Coping Mechanisms / Strategies Used by Preschool Teachers in Addressing Difficulties	Uses different mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties; this includes playing, designing rules, engaging in the use of technology, and having a friendly environment.	Used different mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties, this includes being independent before socializing, knowing interests and limits, having a learner-centered environment.	Used different mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties, this includes group activities, making pupils feel that they belong, using video lessons, and creating diverse materials for diverse learners.	Uses different mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties, this includes playing, singing, and making pupils feel belong and are heard.	Uses different mechanisms and strategies in addressing difficulties; these include play-based learning, emotion-focused coping skills, digital play, digital literacy, digital storytelling, and using indoor and outdoor spaces.
Effective Strategies in Promoting Social Skills and Cooperation	One of the strategies that she used in promoting social skills and cooperation among preschoolers was through play. Playing is believed to promote social skills. Playing with others helps pupils be involved in conversations and builds and maintains friendships.	Narrated that children are social beings. But before they learn to socialize, they need to learn first how to be independent, how to manage emotions, and build self-esteem.	Believes that using group activities promotes social skills and cooperation. For pupils to work as a team, teachers should incorporate fun activities in the discussion.	Makes sure that she explains the situation of some pupils who have special needs.	Believes that preschoolers are motivated to cooperate with others through play-based learning. Furthermore, this also promotes social skills as they are learning new skills.
Effective Coping Mechanisms and Strategies in Managing Behavior and Discipline Issues in Preschoolers	Keeping rules clear and simple is an effective strategy in managing preschoolers' behavior. Praising them for positive behavior and letting them understand the consequences of their behavior are also effective strategies.	Believes that managing a classroom and maintaining discipline involves knowing pupils' interests and limits. Keeping rules simple and easy to follow by the pupils.	Pupils needed to feel that they belong. It is also important that they feel appreciated for every action they make, whether be it big or not.	Uses songs and plays in managing children's behavior, explains to them the reason why they need to be quiet, and also keeps pupils busy by giving them activities	One way to teach children on how to manage behavior is by teaching Emotion-Focused Coping Skills.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Most Effective Approaches in Integrating Technology and Digital Tools	Using technology helps teacher to create a vision for a technology enabled learning environment. Technology will then be helpful in creating child-centered, playful, creative and interactive environment.	Narrated that technology facilitates teaching and learning. Preschoolers learn in a learner-centered environment which is facilitated by technology.	Using video lessons is believed to be the most effective approach in integrating technology in the classroom.	Technology integration in the classroom is effective in getting pupils' attention. She uses technology by incorporating motivational songs, games and videos.	Integrates technology by promoting digital play and exploring digital literacy through digital story telling. These encourages creativity among preschoolers.
Most Successful Coping Mechanisms and Strategies for Fostering a Positive and Inclusive Classroom Environment	Believes that fostering a positive and inclusive classroom environment is a product of having a colorful and child-friendly classroom. Also, it is important to let the learners feel that they are loved.	Believes that to foster a positive and inclusive environment, it is important to have a friendly aura. It is also worth noting that pupils thrive hard on things that they are good at.	Narrated that to foster a positive and inclusive classroom environment, it is important to create a safe environment for the pupils.	Have an inclusive classroom environment, pupils must feel that they belong and are heard in the classroom.	She said that an inclusive environment uses both indoor and outdoor spaces. These spaces are then built and organized to support participation and engagement to engage every pupils to quality experiences.
Realizations of Preschool Teachers in their Beginning Year/s	Realized that teaching preschoolers is challenging but soon realized that she also learns from learners as well.	Realized that teaching preschoolers takes a lot of love and passion for the vocation, and it challenges patience and strength.	Realized that teaching preschoolers is not easy but still fulfilling. Teaching takes a lot of patience and hard work.	Realized that as a teacher, you must be passionate about teaching no matter how challenging the situation may be and that teaching is different from what she expected.	Realized that teaching is challenging but a fulfilling career.

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Realizations on own Strengths, Limitations, and Professional Growth Areas During Initial Years as a Preschool Teacher	She realized that teaching is an everyday challenge. Teaching preschoolers was hard during the beginning but her everyday experiences with the pupils, seminars and workshops had helped her in dealing with them.	Realized that teaching is loving your work. Teaching is more of a passion rather than a vocation. Teaching takes a big heart.	Realized that teaching preschoolers is not an easy but fulfilling job. Teaching many pupils is very challenging as a teacher.	Learned that in teaching preschoolers, the teachers have to be passionate. The teacher will always succeed no matter how challenging the situation is. At the end of each year, she will be able to notice the achievements of the pupils.	Believes that preschool lays the foundation for kids to learn. For them to discover what school really means, and should use different methods and structures to help the pupils grow.
Differences on the Realities of Teaching Preschoolers from Initial Expectations or Assumptions	Her initial expectations in teaching preschoolers is that it was easy. Then, what helped her to teach them better is by knowing them individually so that she can teach them creatively.	Does not have many expectations of teaching preschoolers. Pupils of today's generation differ from before, but what matters most is knowing their backgrounds, interests, and limits.	Initially, viewed teaching preschoolers as an easy job because this just involved teaching the basics. Finally, she figured out that teaching first-timers is difficult. Teaching takes a lot of hard work and patience.	Expectations differ from the realities of teaching preschoolers and worried at first that the job and obligations cannot be handled.	Finds that teaching during first year is challenging such as organizing workloads.

Data Syntheses

Experiences and Realizations of Novice Preschool Teachers

Table 2

Challenges encountered in teaching preschoolers

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Encouraging Pupils to Collaborate	Internal factors	Shy	1
		Difficulties in conversations	1
		Separation anxiety	1
		Special needs	1
Knowing Pupils Well	External factors	Beginning learning	1
		Belongingness	1
		Using different strategies	1
Being a Role Model	Positive values	Love for teaching	1
		Sense of fulfillment	1
		Calmness	1

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Limited ICT Equipment Slow Internet Connectivity	Limitations of technology	Limiting the usage of technology	1
Respecting Individual Differences by Providing Engaging Activities	Positive Reinforcement	Knowing learners Respecting and encouraging Active engagement Motivation	1 1 1 1

Table 2 exhibits the participants' views on the challenges encountered in teaching preschoolers focusing on promoting social skills and cooperation; maintaining classroom management and disciplines; integrating technology and digital tools; and addressing unique learning needs and diverse backgrounds.

Table 3

Coping mechanisms and strategies used by preschool teachers in addressing difficulties

Preschool supervision can be enjoyable, but it can also provide difficulties. Since their coping skills and emotional regulation are still developing, young children may exhibit challenging behaviors such as tantrums and meltdowns.

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Use of Play in Promoting Social Skills and Collaboration	Self-awareness	Independence	1
		Emotional management	1
		Self-esteem	1
	Fostering connection	Interactive sessions	1
		Technology integration	1
		Real-life integration	1
		Praise	1
Setting Simple Rules for Pupils	Building positive relationships	Interest and limitations	1
		Modeling	1
		Belongingness	1
	Providing physical activities	Appreciation	1
		Song	1
		Play	1
		Keeping pupils busy	1
Multimedia as a Tool in Enhancing Skills	Fostering pupil-centered learning	Interactive learning environment	1
		Learner-centered	1
		Playing	1
		Thriving	1
Making Pupils Feel Belong, Heard, and Loved	Positive Reinforcement	Commending	1
		Pupils' voice	1

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Having a Pupils Friendly and Safe Environment	Fostering pupil-centered learning	Diverse learning materials	1
		Play	1
	Modeling	Model	1

Table 3 shows various coping techniques and strategies developed from the preschool teachers' responses such as self-awareness and fostering connection; providing physical activities; fostering pupils-centered learning; and positive reinforcement.

Table 3

The realizations of preschool teachers in their beginning year/s

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Teaching as a Challenging yet Fulfilling Profession	Professional identity	Teaching as a vocation	1
		Big heart for teaching	1
		Inspiration	1
		Passion	1
		Fantastic and enjoyable	1
	Building rapport	Love for children	1
		Reality of Education	1
		Variety of methods	1
		Pupils' backgrounds	1
		Parents' expectations	1
Difficulties of Teaching	Emotional and mental labor	Patience and hard work	1
		Workloads	1
		Competent	1
Co-creation of Knowledge	Intergenerational understanding	Generation gaps	1
	Fulfillment	Fulfilling	1

Table 4

The realizations of preschool teachers in their beginning year/s

Theme	Subthemes	Codes	Number of responses
Teaching as a Challenging yet Fulfilling Profession	Professional identity	Teaching as a vocation	1
		Big heart for teaching	1
		Inspiration	1
		Passion	1
	Building rapport	Fantastic and enjoyable	1
		Love for children	1

		Reality of Education	1
		Variety of methods	1
		Pupils' backgrounds	1
		Parents' expectations	1
Difficulties of Teaching	Emotional and mental labor	Patience and hard work	1
		Workloads	1
		Competent	1
Co-creation of Knowledge	Intergenerational understanding	Generation gaps	1
	Fulfillment	Fulfilling	1

Table 4 exhibits novice preschool teachers' realizations. Their realizations extend beyond technical proficiency and include professional development, emotional maturation, and a reinterpretation of what constitutes success in early childhood education. As reflected in Table 4, professional identity and building rapport; emotional and mental labor; difference between the teachers' initial expectations and assumptions; and intergenerational understanding and fulfillment emerged as the major realization of the preschool teachers.

DISCUSSION

Challenges Encountered in Teaching Preschoolers

Encouraging Pupils to Collaborate

In the classroom, it is important to build collaboration among pupils. Collaborative learning is a general term for any activity in which pupils work together to attain a common learning goal (Barkley, Cross & Major 2014). It has been found to improve pupils' motivation, academic achievement, effort, tenacity, and critical thinking (Scager et al., 2016). Collaborative learning creates a setting in which pupils can hold one another accountable for meeting common learning objectives (Loes, 2022).

Cheng, Wu and Su (2021) mentioned that when compared to solitary learning, collaborative learning allows pupils to talk and analyze at a higher level, and material can be memorized for a longer period. However, barriers to effective pupils' collaboration exist, such as pupils' lack of collaborative skills and free riding (Ha, Jeroen, & Theo, 2018). Engelmann and Tomasello (2013) found that the ability to interact enhances preschoolers' motivation for difficult activities.

Knowing Pupils Well

Knowing pupils well is essential for an effective and efficient teaching and learning process. According to Heyman (2008) as cited in O'Reilly, Devitt and Hayes (2022), preschool-age children evaluate general knowledge when considering others as information sources. Teachers who understand changes can better promote the cognitive development of preschoolers (Allen & Kelly, 2015).

Being a Role Model

Being a role model is essential for preschoolers. Role models can have an impact on pupils' objectives, goal adoption, goal reinforcement, and achievement (Morgenroth, Ryan & Peters (2015).

During early childhood, teachers can function as role models for children's behavior (Cheung, 2020). Teachers who model excellent behaviors such as kindness, respect, and responsibility can assist pupils in developing these characteristics as well (Govindharajan, Com & Phil (2017).

Limited ICT Equipment

The availability of ICT equipment is one of the challenges in preschool education especially when there is not enough equipment to use. Due to limited access to hardware and software, technical malfunctions, and a lack of technical support, teachers may experience challenges while implementing ICT technologies in the classroom (Ghavifekr et al., 2016).

Fu (2013) found that administrative and ICT infrastructure constraints, such as a lack of suitable administrative support for effective ICT use, might also exist. While some studies suggest that technology is used in preschool classes, the amount and types of technology available to preschoolers differ significantly (Dore & Dinia, 2020).

Slow Internet Connectivity

Slow internet connections can make using ICT in preschool difficult. Furthermore, schools are expanding the number of pupils devices in use, transitioning to wireless internet usage, and implementing online pupils testing, all of which rely on and affect internet speed and bandwidth capacity.

Respecting Individual Differences by Providing Engaging Activities

Integrating activities related to different cultures, genders, physical and mental abilities, and physical and mental abilities into organized learning experiences can also help children observe and reflect on variations throughout the world. Teachers can use classroom materials, classroom design, and teaching practices that encourage social development to build a learning environment to enhance social behavior (Obaki, 2017).

Coping Mechanisms and Strategies Used by Preschool Teachers in Addressing Difficulties

Use of Play in Promoting Social Skills and Collaboration

Several research studies have examined the role of games in fostering social skills and collaboration in preschool. Group games help to enhance social skills in the sphere of cooperation (Sohrabi, 2021). According to a literature review by Pellegrini and Smith (2019), play is crucial for young children's social skill development.

Setting Simple Rules for Pupils

A key aspect of preschool management in the classroom is establishing clear, concise rules for the pupils. There should only be four or five "golden" rules, which should be concise, understandable, and maintained to a minimum (Egeberg, McConney & Price, 2021). In order to foster a sense of accountability and ownership, educators should also include pupils in the process of developing classroom rules (Edwards, 2016).

Multimedia as a Tool in Enhancing Skills

A range of skills can be effectively improved with the use of multimedia, including audio, photos, and videos. Singh and Mishra (2013) found that preschoolers' fundamental motor abilities improved when they used video media tools. Mayer (2014) discovered that learners may pick up and retain material more rapidly and efficiently when they receive multimedia instruction.

Making Pupils Feel Belong, Heard and Loved

Preschoolers' social and emotional development depends on fostering a sense of belongingness. By forming partnerships with families and kids, engaging in deep listening to get insight into their pupils, and creating a classroom environment that promotes belonging, educators may help children feel like they belong (Brown, 2021).

Hattie (2013) found that classroom atmosphere has a considerable impact on pupils' outcomes, including academic success, social-emotional development, and conduct, according to this meta-analysis of 800 studies. According to Yeager and Dweck (2021), pupils' motivation, engagement, and achievement are all dependent on their sense of being heard in the classroom. Pianta and Hamre (2020) discussed in a book how to develop rapport, trust, and respect with pupils as well as the significance of teacher-pupil interactions.

Having a Pupils-Friendly and Safe Environment

For young children's physical, social and emotional development, preschool environments must be secure and welcoming to all pupils. A study revealed that encouraging pupils' progress requires school safety. Pupils who feel comfortable in the classroom are more likely to focus on their studies, attend class consistently, and participate in class, according to research (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2015). Also, the significance of fostering an inclusive and friendly school environment for all kids is covered in this book. The authors contend that for kids to feel respected, safe, and supported, a positive school climate is necessary (Gay & Kirkland, 2017).

Realizations of Preschool Teachers in their Beginning Year/s

Teaching as a Challenging yet Fulfilling Profession

Teaching is one of the most challenging professions, but one of the most fulfilling. Challenges of preschool teachers include figuring out what indicators indicate a child is ready for kindergarten, coordinating preschool and kindergarten curricula, and enhancing pupils' preparedness for kindergarten (Alonzo, 2021). Preschool teachers find their work rewarding despite these difficulties.

Difficulties of Teaching

The teaching career is believed to be a difficult profession that requires a range of skills and knowledge. Researchers believe that one of the most significant school-based resources in predicting children's lifetime achievements and future academic success is their teacher (Burroughs, 2019). On the other hand, identifying the qualities of a good teacher can be challenging. There is plenty of research on the topic of teacher quality, but there is still little proof of how teacher attributes—such as experience and professional knowledge—affect pupils' outcomes (Burroughs, 2019).

Co-creation of Knowledge

Teachers also get to learn from pupils along the way. Teachers can use a variety of tactics offered by Hattie and Yates (2016) to listen to their pupils and get knowledge from them.

Conclusions

The novice preschool teachers' experiences include challenges, coping mechanisms, and strategies. Some of the pupils find it hard to work and participate with their classmates. Knowing pupils well encompasses knowing their culture, emotions, interests, and a lot more. Being a role model impacts pupils' achievement, so it is important to foster good attitudes and values. Another challenge for preschool teachers is the limited ICT equipment in the classroom and the slow connectivity to the internet that limits the use of technology.

Preschool teachers used coping mechanisms/ strategies to address these challenges. To develop collaboration among pupils, they let them play while they are learning. Simple rules are also set to establish discipline among learners to enhance their skills.

Given these challenges, and the coping mechanisms/ strategies, preschool teachers realized that teaching is a challenging yet fulfilling profession. Teaching preschoolers is not easy, it needs a lot of patience and hard work.

Recommendations

Novice preschool teachers should be involved in different programs in school. Organizing virtual reality collaboration workshops to help students improve their teamwork abilities in a digital setting. Novice preschool teachers may host these seminars on virtual reality. This creative method can improve group work's interaction and engagement, encouraging students to collaborate more effectively. Another is a tech swap events to be organized by the school administrators and novice preschool teachers to allow companies and people to trade or donate used ICT equipment to educational institutions. This initiative encourages community involvement and support for education in addition to giving schools access to modern technologies.

Community coding clubs to be headed by the novice preschool teachers is another strategy to teach students about coding and technology, start coding clubs in collaboration with nearby companies and governmental organizations. These groups can help kids get ready for the digital future by fostering creativity, problem-solving skills, and teamwork.

Peer mentorship programs may also be done to put in place peer mentorship programs in which seasoned teachers guide new preschool teachers. By working together, it guarantees that educators receive continuous support, direction, and chances for professional growth, keeping them up to date on the newest developments and best practices in early childhood education.

To provide novice preschool teachers with interactive online training modules that emphasize successful group work facilitation methods and cooperative teaching practices, interactive online teacher training modules may be used. These modules are designed to specifically address the difficulties teachers encounter in encouraging student participation and are freely accessible.

Aside from these, introducing students to the concept of gamified collaboration tasks, wherein they can earn points or incentives for completing successful group projects may also be useful. This gamification strategy can encourage students to actively participate and work well in groups by making teamwork more enjoyable and competitive.

The researcher will utilize the result of the study to be used in University of the Assumption or in the Elementary Schools in the Division of Pampanga.

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The mediating effect of grit on the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy among preschool teachers

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Abstract

This study investigates how grit mediates the relationship between teachers' perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. Data were collected from 307 preschool teachers who willingly participated in an online survey. The survey was administered through Google Forms containing inquiries on pertinent demographic information and items from the reference standardized questionnaires. The Grit Scale (Grit-S) was used for assessing grit, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was utilized for measuring teachers' perceived stress, and the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) was used for evaluating teachers' self-efficacy.

Results reveal a nonsignificant direct relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. On the other hand, a notable negative association between perceived stress and grit was evident, along with a strong connection between grit and teachers' self-efficacy. Moreover, grit mediates the significant relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy.

The study concludes that a high level of grit can be incredibly beneficial in combating stress and boosting self-efficacy. Cultivating grit can be a powerful tool for managing stress, improving resilience, and increasing self-efficacy of teachers, ultimately contributing to personal and professional growth and success. Schools and educational institutions may consider implementing programs and interventions aimed at developing grit among teachers. These programs may include workshops, seminars, or training sessions focused on building resilience, perseverance, and passion for long-term goals.

Keywords: *grit, perceived stress, teachers' self-efficacy, preschool teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a demanding career that requires a broad outlook of commitment, enthusiasm, and passion, irrespective of the difficulties associated with this noble mission. Teachers must be motivated and committed to achieving their lasting goals to positively affect their students' lives (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). At present, stress is highly prevalent. It affects human life and may also affect the professional and personal aspects of teachers. Kyriacou (2001) reported that about 25 percent of teachers acknowledge teaching as a highly stressful profession. In 2005, it was considered as one of the most stressful professions (Johnson et al., 2005). Faculty in educational institutions, including universities, also face high-stress levels, which undoubtedly affects their self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is a core concept in Social Cognitive Theory that refers to individuals' perceptions of their capabilities to accomplish specific actions in particular contexts (Bandura, 1997). It plays a significant role in influencing individuals' task choices, effort levels, persistence, resilience in the face of obstacles, and effectiveness in regulating their thoughts, actions, and plans (Schunk & Meece, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2010). The kind of effectiveness that pertains to teachers is referred to as teacher efficacy.

Aside from efficacy, there is a universal predictor of life success that has been found to positively impact academic outcomes, social relationships, as well as psychological and physical well-being. That predictor that has received increased focus during the last few years is grit. Grit is considered by scholars as a performance character strength, drawn upon to achieve one's potential in a particular challenge (Soutter & Seider, 2013). Gritty individuals are more successful in achieving their goals and in attaining excellence in competitive environments (Christopoulou et al., 2018). Grit is very beneficial for individuals in various life contexts as it relates to work satisfaction, career performance, emotional outcomes, and motivation (Widodo & Gunawan, 2021).

This study focuses on preschool teachers as the main target respondents. Being a preschool teacher is not an easy thing to do, and in fact, it can be quite challenging at times. It needs specific and professional skills that not everyone can handle, especially when children have tantrums that make them more susceptible to stress (Maryati & Mustika, 2016). Kindergarten teacher duties include designing a teaching plan and using activities and instructional methods to motivate children and keep them engaged throughout the class.

Teaching in early childhood education, with an emphasis on creativity, patience, and critical thinking skills, fosters the development of lifelong learners among preschoolers. This goal aligns with the principles outlined in the Enhanced K to 12 Basic Education Program and the key points highlighted in the EDCOM 2 report. To achieve this, it is important to foster a curriculum that integrates global best practices with local contexts, emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy. Teachers must invest in continuous professional development to enhance their pedagogical skills and adaptability.

While numerous studies have explored these topics (stress, teachers' efficacy, grit) individually, there is a notable absence of localized research that simultaneously incorporates these three latent constructs. To fill this gap, the researcher conducted the research within the local context.

The main objective of this study is to develop a model equation that explains the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy, and the mediating effect of grit between these two variables. Additionally, it aims to assess the current levels of grit, perceived stress, and teachers' self-efficacy among the respondents. This information may serve as a basis for designing training programs aimed at stress management or enhancing affective well-being among teachers. Moreover, the study may suggest programs aimed at strengthening or increasing levels of grit and teaching efficacy. Furthermore, the study seeks to contribute significantly to the UA educational research agenda in two key areas: firstly, by addressing the obligation to enhance

teachers' grit and efficacy, and secondly, by focusing on managing skills required in the teaching profession.

The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To determine the levels of grit, teachers' self-efficacy, and perceived stress of preschool teachers in the chosen locale.
2. To determine the relationship of:
 - 2.1. perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy;
 - 2.2. perceived stress and grit;
 - 2.3. grit and teachers' self-efficacy.
3. To determine the mediating effect of grit in the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy among preschool teachers.
4. To describe the model fit and quality indices of framework.

Hypothesis Development

Stress and self-efficacy are closely related concepts. In Lazarus' cognitive model of stress, people with high self-efficacy beliefs show confidence in their skills and abilities to do well and have been shown to participate more in learning activities. Whereas some individuals put greater effort and persistence to attain higher performance than those with low self-efficacy (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). However, much stress is likely to detract from learning and may also influence performance and decision-making capabilities. Similarly, Klassen and Chiu (2010) found that teachers experiencing high levels of stress in the classroom exhibited lower levels of self-efficacy concerning instructional strategies and student engagement. Generally, the most harmful effect of stress is disrupting thinking and performance (Akbari et al., 2011). Teachers' self-efficacy is related to the teaching profession. Teachers with high self-efficacy encourage a healthy commitment to their careers and a collaborative partnership with stakeholders, leading to a favorable learning environment. Likewise, resourceful teachers with high self-efficacy should experience less stress and burnout whereas teachers with low self-efficacy were found to be quitting the teaching profession. Furthermore, an investigation by Skaalvik (2016) demonstrated that heightened stress levels in teaching were predictive of diminished teacher self-efficacy, consequently leading to intentions to leave their positions. Therefore, H1 – Perceived stress significantly and negatively affects teachers' self-efficacy.

Previous study shows that grit is protective of individuals' well-being. This is mainly explained by the protective function Grit has in the process of stress development. Gritty people believe that they are capable of overcoming adversities and difficulties, which will affect their stress response positively (Moen & Olsen, 2020). Teachers with high grit tend to view difficulties in their school activities as challenging situations, even when experiencing job-related stress that may diminish their emotional commitment. Despite facing such challenges, high-grit teachers maintain their enthusiasm for the teaching profession and remain committed to achieving their long-term goals as educators (Lee, 2020). Hence, H2 – Perceived stress is significantly and negatively related to grit.

Grit is defined as the extent of persistence and determination individuals exhibit in pursuing long-term goals amid challenges. Fabelico & Afalla, (2020) found a significant positive association

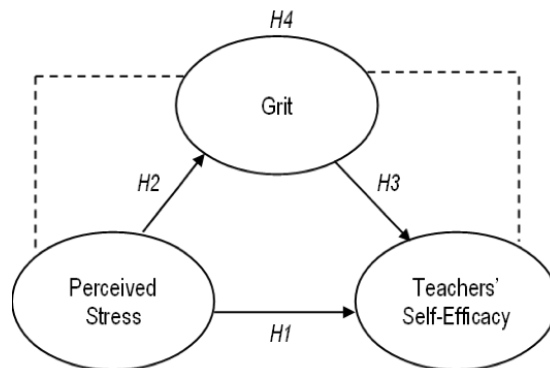
between effort, persistence, and self-efficacy in adjustment to needs, inspiring students, and dealing with change. The persistent efforts of teachers influenced their overall self-efficacy. Indeed, these findings indicate that teachers' continuous efforts have spurred them to cultivate high levels of self-efficacy, empowering them to address their own needs, motivate students, and adapt to changes in their professional careers. Teachers with strong levels of efficacy perceive the challenges of teaching as less threatening because they have confidence in their abilities to effectively handle and overcome setbacks. This confidence, often equated with grit, reduces the experience of negative emotions, and enhances one's potential to excel in a particular challenge (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014). Thus, H3 – Grit is significantly and positively related to teachers' self-efficacy.

Preceding studies have shown that gritty individuals feel happier and have more life satisfaction, and people with high grit have high self-efficacy, high self-esteem, low perceived stress, and are more emotionally stable during stressful or negative life events (Morris, 2021). Individuals with a high degree of grit possess the ability to persist and maintain interest in their goals despite encountering perceived difficulties and setbacks. These people have a firm belief in their abilities, which enables them to develop confidence in every task they undertake. Consequently, they demonstrate a greater willingness to engage in self-regulated learning and experience a heightened sense of gratification as they work toward achieving their objectives (Zhang et al., 2023). Combining these previous studies, gritty individuals who stay passionate and persevere against frustration may interpret failure more optimistically and be less prone to negative emotions and depressive episodes. Hence, H4 – Grit mediates the significant relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy.

The research framework illustrates the three constructs and their potential connections as derived from the literature review and hypotheses. Figure 1 below depicts the direct impact of Perceived Stress on Teachers' Self-Efficacy, as well as the mediating role of Grit in the connection between Perceived Stress and Teachers' Self-Efficacy. Figure 1 was created to illustrate the potential relationship between teachers' perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy, along with the mediating influence of grit

Figure 1

Research framework



METHOD

The present study employed both descriptive and predictive-causal methodologies. The descriptive approach was used to outline the demographic characteristics of teacher- respondents and to present the levels of grit, perceived stress, and teachers' self-efficacy among them. Conversely, the predictive-causal research design was utilized to predict the impact of perceived stress on the teaching efficacy of the respondents and to evaluate the hypothesized mediating role of grit between the relationship of perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy.

The respondents were kindergarten teachers who are twenty-five to forty (25-40) years old and are currently working in public schools and private schools. Public schools are funded and operated by the government, whereas private schools are funded and operated independently by religious or secular institutions. The respondents have at least three (3) years of work experience. The study engaged 307 respondents who met the participant's inclusion criteria and who consented to take part in an online survey. The online survey contained some demographic information and standardized questionnaires: the Grit Scale (Grit-S) for measuring grit, the PSS-10 or Perceived Stress Scale for perceived stress assessment, and the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES), a short form for weighing teachers' self-efficacy. The study used Google Forms for data collection.

To ascertain if the mentioned sample size was adequate, the researcher referred to the guidelines outlined in Amora (2023). According to these guidelines, the minimum number of participants required for the analysis is 116, computed with the inverse square root method, and 103, determined through the gamma exponential method. Figures were calculated by WarpPLS 8.0, factoring in an 80% statistical power, a 5% significance level, and a minimum absolute path coefficient of 0.231. Consequently, with an actual sample size of 307, the study surpasses the required threshold, indicating that the size sample is very much adequate for the model's analysis.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents in the study. The majority of the respondents are teaching in public schools (88.27%) and 11.73% are teaching in private schools. The table also shows that 89.6% of the respondents are females while 10.4% are males. Furthermore, the table presents that the largest proportion of respondents, accounting for 44.95%, are 31-35 years old, while the smallest proportion, comprising 21.17%, are 36-40 years old. Most respondents are married (66.45%), 32.57% are single, 0.65% are widowed/widower, and 0.33% are separated/annulled.

Table 1
Demographic profile of respondents

Items	N	%	Items	N	%
Type of School			Sex		
Public	271	88.27	Male	32	10.42
Private	36	11.73	Female	275	89.58
Age			Civil Status		
25-30	104	33.88	Single	100	32.57
31-35	138	44.95	Married	204	66.45
36-40	65	21.17	Separated / Annulled	1	0.33
			Widowed / Widower	2	0.65

In this study, three standardized scales were employed to measure the constructs: Grit, Perceived Stress, and Teachers' Self-Efficacy. The survey instrument has two parts. The first part measures teachers' attributes such as age, gender, civil status, and institutional placement. The second part is for measuring the latent constructs (grit, perceived stress, and teachers' self-efficacy).

An adopted Grit-Survey questionnaire (Grit-S) by Duckworth and Quinn was used to measure grit. It involves 8 items to assess individuals' ability to maintain focus, interest, and perseverance in achieving long-range objectives. Every item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (very much like me) to 5 (not like me at all). In this scale, scores are calculated by adding up all the points and dividing them by the number of items. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty). Higher scores on the Grit Scale indicate a greater degree of perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Individuals with high scores are more likely to maintain focus and effort over an extended period, even in the face of setbacks or obstacles. Prior studies report acceptable reliability for the Grit-S, with Cronbach's alpha value of .83.

For perceived stress, the study used the Perceived Stress Scale also known as PSS. It was initially developed by Cohen et al. (1983). The scale is widely employed to evaluate stress levels in individuals aged 12 and above and has demonstrated reliability and validity. It comprises 10 items to assess the extent to which an individual perceives life as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloading over the past month. Respondents weigh each item in a 5-point Likert scale

ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Scores are calculated by summing the responses to all items. Higher scores indicate a greater perceived level of stress, with individuals perceiving their lives as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded with difficulties. Conversely, lower scores suggest a lower perceived level of stress, with individuals feeling that their lives are more manageable and less overwhelming. The PSS-10 has shown to be reliable and valid across various population sub-groups, with previous studies reporting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.86.

To measure Teachers' Self-efficacy, the study adopted the Teacher's Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Tschannen–Moran. This scale aims to assess the challenges that teachers encounter in their school activities. The scale comprises 12 items that cover three subscales: efficacy in classroom management (ECM), efficacy in student engagement (ESE), and efficacy in instructional strategies (EIS). This self-report measure is scored on a nine point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (nothing) to 9 (a great deal). Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of self-efficacy, while lower scores may indicate areas for professional development or support. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for this scale were calculated to be 0.823, indicating good internal consistency.

In the analysis of data, descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean were employed to examine the information collected from the three instruments used in the study. To explore the mediating role of Grit on the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy, Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) was used. PLS-SEM is a widely accepted method for estimating path models with latent constructs and their interrelationships (Ringle & Hair, 2021). The statistical software WarpPLS was employed to conduct the PLS-SEM analysis in this study.

RESULTS

Respondents' Levels of Grit, Teachers' Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Stress

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of constructs used in the current study. As shown in the table, respondents are sometimes experiencing stress ($M=2.12$, $sd=0.65$). As indicated by the overall mean interpretation of grit, respondents are found to be moderately gritty ($M=3.28$, $sd=0.75$). Moreover, the overall mean interpretation of TSE is Quite a Bit ($M=7.56$, $sd=0.97$).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
GRIT	3.28	0.75	Moderately Gritty
TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY (TSE)	7.56	0.97	Quite a Bit
Perceived Stress (STRESS)	2.12	0.65	Sometimes

*Note: 1=not at all gritty, 2=slightly gritty, 3=moderately gritty, 4=very gritty 5=extremely gritty
1-2=nothing, 3-4=very little, 5-6=some influence, 7-8=quite a bit, 9=a great deal
0=never, 1=almost never, 2=sometimes, 3=fairly often 4=very often*

The present study used PLS-SEM to investigate the relationships of the three constructs: GRIT, Stress, and TSE. SEM is commonly examined and interpreted in a step by-step manner. It involves measurement model analysis (validity and reliability) subsequently followed by assessing model fit and quality indices, and then the structural model (effects of constructs on the others).

Reliability and Validity Measurements

Convergent validity is the degree to which different measures of the same construct produce similar results, indicating that they are measuring the intended construct accurately. The study adhered to Amora's (2021) loading approach criteria to evaluate convergent validity, which involves ensuring that indicator loadings meet three criteria: a) they should be at least .50 or higher, b) associated P-values should be less than .05, and c) cross-loadings must be lower than indicator loadings. Items that did not meet the criteria were removed. In this study, items under the Teacher's Self-Efficacy (TSE) latent variable remained included because they met three criteria for convergent validity. However, items under the stress latent variable (Stress4, Stress5, Stress7, and Stress8) and the grit latent variable (Grit2, Grit4, Grit7, and Grit8) were excluded from the analysis due to violations of the previously mentioned requirements. After these exclusions, convergent validity for the latent variables was successfully achieved.

Convergent validity can be assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), where a value of 0.50 or higher indicates validity convergence (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Kock & Lynn, 2012; Kock, 2022). Additionally, according to Kock (2022), composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha should be 0.70 or higher to ensure reliability. As reflected in Table 3, all latent constructs satisfy the acceptable convergent validity.

Table 3

Reliability measures and convergent validity

Construct / Item	Item Loadings	Average Variance Extracted	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
GRIT	0.69	0.58	0.85	0.76
Grit1	0.77			
Grit3	0.81			
Grit5	0.78			
Grit6				
Teacher's Self-Efficacy		0.89	0.96	0.94
ECM	0.94			
ESE	0.95			
EIS	0.95			

Perceived Stress				
Stress1	0.77	0.53	0.87	0.82
Stress2	0.79			
Stress3	0.74			
Stress6	0.60			
Stress9	0.75			
Stress10	0.72			

According to Kock (2023), a measurement instrument has good discriminant validity if the question statements associated with each latent variable are not confused by the respondents, in terms of their meaning, with the question statements associated with other latent variables. The novel methods for evaluating discriminant validity rely on HTMT (heterotrait monotrait ratio of correlations), specifically the traditional HTMT (Henseler et al., 2015) and its enhanced version known as HTMT2 (Roemer et al., 2021). The traditional HTMT operates under the assumption of tau-equivalent measurement models, while the HTMT2 provides a consistent measure for congeneric measurement models (Roemer et al., 2021).

Data in Table 4 represents HTMT2 values, indicating the discriminant validity between pairs of latent variables. As observed, all HTMT2 data gathered are less than 0.85, which is a commonly accepted threshold for demonstrating discriminant validity (Roemer et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the latent variables in the study exhibit discriminant validity, suggesting that they measure distinct constructs.

Table 4

Discriminant validity using HTMT2 ratios

	Grit	TSE	PS
Grit		.24	.39
Teachers' Self Efficacy (TSE)			.10
Perceived Stress (PS)			

Common method bias can be assessed using full collinearity VIF (Kock, 2022; Kock, 2015; Kock & Lynn, 2012). Full collinearity VIFs of 3.3 or lower suggest the existence of no common method bias (Kock, 2015; Kock & Lynn, 2012). The Full collinearity VIFs in Table 5, are lower than 3.3, this reflects that the constructs in the study passed the common method bias test. To ensure predictive relevance and determine the strength of the effects in the structural model analysis, the Q2 coefficients and coefficient of determination (R2) are examined. According to Geisser (1974) and Kock (2020), Q2 coefficients should exceed 0 to meet the criteria for predictive relevance of the construct. Additionally, R2 coefficients less than 0.02, as suggested by Cohen (1988) and Kock (2014), indicate that the effects are too weak to be considered relevant. Table 5 shows that all constructs met the R2 and Q2 standards.

Table 5*Full collinearity VIF, R2 and Q2*

Latent Construct	Full Collinearity VIF	R ²	Q ²
Grit	1.16	.108	.111
TSE	1.05	.70	.074
Stress	1.11		

The results for the model fit and quality indices statistics are in Table 7. The criteria shown are taken from Kock (2023). The following indices are used to evaluate the overall model fit: average path coefficient (APC), average R-squared (ARS), average adjusted R squared (AARS), average block VIF, average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF), tenenhaus GoF (GoF), standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), standardized mean absolute residual (SMAR). The model fit indices in Table 6 satisfied the recommended criteria.

Table 6*Model fit and quality indices of framework*

	Value	P-value	Criteria*	Remark
Average path coefficient (APC)	.216	.000	P should be less than .05	Ok. The P value is significant
Average R-squared (ARS)	.089	.029	P should be less than .05	Ok. P value is significant.
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	.085	.033	P should be less than .05	Ok. P value is significant.
Average block VIF	1.053	NA	Acceptable if ≤ 5 ; ideally ≤ 3.3	Ideal
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.109	NA	Acceptable if ≤ 5 ; ideally ≤ 3.3	Ideal
TenenhausGoF (GoF)	.244	NA	small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36	Large
Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR)	.088	NA	Acceptable if $\leq .10$	Acceptable
Standardized Mean Absolute Residual (SMAR)	.073	NA	Acceptable if $\leq .10$	Acceptable

Relationship of the Variables

The Pearson correlation coefficient is a descriptive statistic used to describe the relationship between variables in this study. It summarizes the characteristics of a dataset. It quantifies the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. Interpretations of the relationship strength, or effect size, can vary between disciplines. In Table 7, the correlation values adhere to general rules of thumb (Turney, 2022).

Table 7

Pearson correlation coefficient interpretation

Pearson correlation coefficient (r) value	Strength	Direction
Greater than .5	Strong	Positive
Between .3 and .5	Moderate	Positive
Between 0 and .3	Weak	Positive
0	None	None
Between 0 and -.3	Weak	Negative
Between -.3 and -.5	Moderate	Negative
Less than -.5	Strong	Negative

Table 8 presents the correlation between variables. The correlation between Grit and PS (-0.32) indicates a moderate negative correlation, suggesting that as Grit increases, stress tends to decrease. Conversely, the correlation between Grit and TSE (0.22) indicates a weak positive correlation, implying that as Grit increases, TSE also tends to increase. Additionally, the correlation between TSE and Stress (-0.88) demonstrates a strong negative correlation, indicating that as TSE increases, Stress decreases. Each Pearson *r* is accompanied by double asterisks (**) to signify that the correlation coefficient is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 8

Pearson correlations among the variables

	Grit	TSE	Stress
Grit			
TSE	0.22**		
PS	-0.32**	-0.08**	

Mediation Model Results (Relationship of Variables)

Table 9 and Figure 3 show the parameter estimates of the structural model. The analysis of the data reveals that with a small effect size, the direct effect of Stress on TSE is non-significant ($\beta=-0.09$, $p<0.06$, $f^2=0.13$); thereby, H1 is not supported.

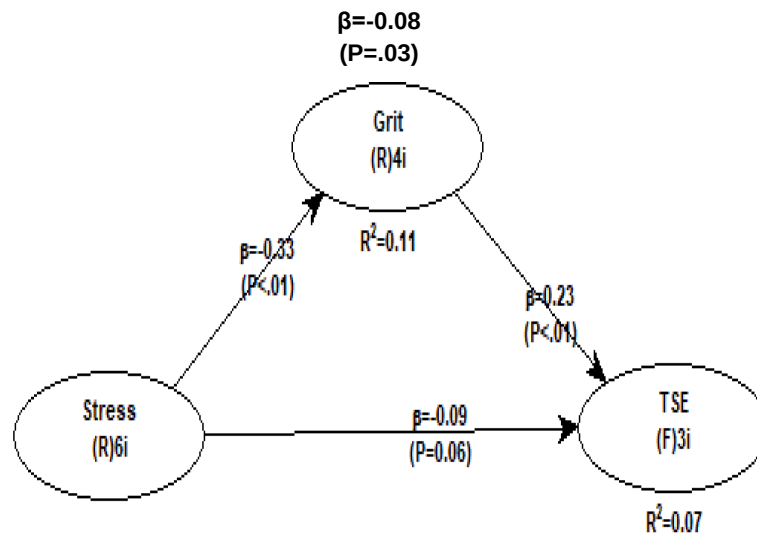
Conversely, Stress significantly influences GRIT ($\beta=-0.33$, $p<0.01$), having a small effect size ($f^2=0.108$); thus, H2 is supported.

Moreover, the data reveals that GRIT is positively linked to TSE ($\beta=0.23$, $p<0.01$) with a small effect size ($f^2=0.58$). The positive relationship indicates that teachers' high level of grit increases TSE; hence, H3 is supported.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis indicates that, although there is a small effect size ($f^2=0.011$), GRIT significantly mediates Stress and TSE ($\beta=-0.08$, $p<0.03$). The negative correlation between Stress and GRIT ($\beta=-0.33$, $p<0.01$, $f^2=0.108$) shows this result, therefore causing TSE to be positively affected ($\beta=0.23$, $p<0.01$, $f^2=0.058$); therefore, H4 is supported.

Figure 3

Research model with the parameter estimates



Cohen's f^2 is a measure of effect size used in structural equation modeling (SEM). It quantifies the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by a predictor variable, after accounting for the effects of other predictors in the model. If $f^2=0.02$; this is considered a small effect size, indicating that the predictor variable has a small impact on the dependent variable. If $f^2=0.15$; this is considered a medium effect size, indicating that the predictor variable has a moderate impact on the dependent variable. And if $f^2=0.35$; this is considered a large effect size,

indicating that the predictor variable has a substantial impact on the dependent variable. In Table 9, all predictor variables have a small effect size on the dependent variables.

Table 9
Effects of the variables on the other variables

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	SE	p-value	Effect size	Remark
A. Direct Effects					
H1: Stress → TSE	-.09	.056	.06	.013	Not Supported
H2: Stress → Grit	-.33	.054	.00	.108	Supported
H3: Grit →TSE	.23	.055	.00	.058	Supported
B. Indirect Effect					
H4: Stress →Grit→TSE	-.08	.040	.03	.011	Supported
C. Total Effect					Supported
Stress →TSE	-.16	.056	.01	.023	Supported

Note: f^2 is Cohen's (1988) effect size: 0.02=small, 0.15=medium, 0.35=large.

DISCUSSION

This present study investigates the effect of grit as a mediator on the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy of preschool teachers. It also intends to know and describe levels of stress, grit, and teachers' self-efficacy among teacher respondents. Moreover, the study would like to test the following hypotheses found in the proposed research framework.

Research Hypotheses:

H1 – Perceived stress significantly and negatively affects teachers' self-efficacy.

H2 – Perceived stress is significantly and negatively related to grit.

H3 – Grit is significantly and positively related to teachers' self-efficacy.

H4 – Grit mediates the significant relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy.

The results show that stress sometimes manifests among the respondents (M=2.12, sd=0.65). As indicated by the overall mean interpretation of grit, respondents are found to be moderately gritty (M=3.28, sd=0.75). Moreover, the overall mean interpretation of TSE is Quite a Bit (M=7.56, sd=0.97).

The analysis of the data shows no observed relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. The scores acquired from the two instruments cannot be associated with each other. Therefore, H1 is not supported. This result is unexpected and contradicts previous literature, which suggests that individuals with greater self-efficacy typically experience less stress in challenging situations due to their beliefs about their ability to cope (Nobile and McCormick, 2005). Perceived stress does not affect self-efficacy. The study of Ipek (2018) shows that there are no consistent patterns found between these two variables. Individuals may encounter high levels of stress while simultaneously possessing and benefiting from a greater level of self-efficacy, or they may experience low levels of stress alongside a strong level of efficacy.

Additionally, the outcome of this study showed that perceived stress is significantly and negatively related to grit. Gritty people believe they can overcome adversities and difficulties, which will positively affect their stress response (Moen & Olsen, 2020). Hence, H2 is supported. This was confirmed by the data gathered from previous studies stating that educators having high grit accept stress as a challenging situation and do not exhibit a lower passion for the teaching profession as the long-term goal to achieve as a teacher. Indeed, teachers with high levels of grit demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination in pursuing their long-term goals, even when faced with significant challenges along the way. Another study regarding these two variables revealed that grit has a huge role in reducing the occurrence of stress and depression. Indeed, grit plays a pivotal role in mitigating stress and promoting resilience among individuals. Grittier individuals tend to possess mindfulness and a growth mindset, enabling them to reframe negative experiences and adopt new perspectives on life. This process empowers individuals to develop effective problem-solving strategies, enhance learning efficiency, and improve interpersonal communication patterns, ultimately alleviating negative emotions (Lee et al., 2021). Moreover, research by McKee (2020) underscores that people with high grit levels are more inclined to maintain optimism even in the face of stress. This resilient mindset allows them to navigate challenges with a positive outlook, thereby reducing the detrimental impact of stress on their well-being. Given these insights, grit emerges as a valuable trait that can benefit teachers in coping with the demands of their profession. Educational leaders can leverage the concept of grit to develop targeted interventions and support programs aimed at equipping teachers with the resilience and perseverance needed to thrive in their roles, ultimately reducing stress and turnover rates within the teaching profession.

This study verified that Grit is significantly and positively related to teachers' self-efficacy, thereby affirming H3 and strengthening findings from prior studies. For instance, Fabelico & Afalla (2020) determined that strong grit motivates educators to exhibit greater levels of self-efficacy, enabling them to address daily demands, inspire students, and navigate life and career transitions effectively. Similarly, Zhang & Naderi (2023) noted that high levels of teacher self-efficacy are linked with increased grit among educators, a trend consistent with earlier investigations by Faravani (2022), and Hasankiadeh and Noughabi (2022). These studies emphasize the predictive role of teacher self-efficacy in determining grit, which aligns with previous research demonstrating a connection between teacher self-efficacy and grit (Dobbins, 2016; Fabelico & Afalla, 2020). This correlation is rationalized by the impact of self-efficacy on individuals' willingness to confront challenges, invest effort, and persevere through adversity (Duckworth 2016; Usher et al. 2019). Additionally, Dobbins (2002) conducted a study supporting a significant connection between

teacher grit and teacher self-efficacy, indicating a positive and statistically important relationship. This implies that as self-efficacy among teachers increases, their grit also increases. These findings hold significance as teachers having high grit tend to exert more effort and demonstrate sustained dedication to their chosen endeavors, as noted by Duckworth et al. (2007; 2009). According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1997), teachers with heightened efficacy tend to persevere when confronted with challenges, remaining steadfast in their commitment to teaching. Given the demanding nature of the teaching profession, understanding methods to strengthen teacher grit becomes essential for educational leaders aiming to foster teacher retention.

Finally, H4 was supported, confirming that grit was a mediating variable in the significant relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. Previous research implies that teachers with a great grit level likely experience joy and contentment in life. Additionally, those with strong grit typically exhibit higher self-efficacy, improved self-esteem, reduced perceived stress levels, and greater emotional resilience when encountering challenges. Further studies support these findings, demonstrating that individuals with high grit experience low mental health issues, employ more effective coping strategies during stressful events, and achieve academic excellence (Kim, 2019; Mason, 2018; Snyder & Lopez, 2009). This indicates that individuals having strong grit thrive in academic environments, adapt more easily to school settings, and experience lower levels of burnout (Gruenberg, 2019). Strong grit enhances emotions and thoughts associated with increased efficacy, like engaging energy and academic excellence. Having positive feelings and mindset, individuals develop positive outlooks on life, friendships, relationships, and interactions, leading to reduced stress (Özhan, 2021).

The model fit indices provide a strong support for the idea that Grit significantly influences perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy, as described in the literature. The model fit indices, such as the average path coefficient (APC), average R-squared (ARS), average adjusted R-squared (AARS), average block VIF, average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF), tenenhaus GoF (GoF), standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), and standardized mean absolute residual (SMAR), indicate that the proposed structural equation model accurately represents the relationship between grit as it mediates the relationship.

Full mediation occurs when the inclusion of a mediator variable (M) in the model completely explains the relationship between an independent variable (X) and a dependent variable (Y). This means that when M is included in the analysis, the effect of X on Y becomes non-significant. In this study, full mediation was evident as the direct effect of Stress on TSE was found to be non-significant. This indicates that when Grit is introduced, Stress no longer directly affects TSE. Instead, Grit becomes positively related to TSE demonstrating that it fully mediates the relationship between Stress and TSE.

Conclusions

1. As per the data analysis, this study concludes that respondents were experiencing an average level of perceived stress, a high rate of self-efficacy, and a moderate level of grit.

2. This study showed no direct relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. With the presence of Grit, the direct effect of Stress on TSE diminishes. Grit serves as a buffer against the effects of Stress, effectively weakening its direct impact on TSE.
3. Perceived stress is significantly and negatively related to grit. As grit increases, Stress tends to decrease. Therefore, Grit overpowers perceived stress. Individuals with higher levels of grit are better able to manage and cope with stress, which can lead to lower levels of overall perceived stress.
4. Grit is significantly and positively related to teachers' self-efficacy. This result exemplifies the existing literature on Grit and TSE. Therefore, it underscores the idea that teachers with higher levels of grit tend to have greater confidence in their abilities to effectively manage their classrooms, support their students' learning engagement, and perform instructional strategies.
5. Grit serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between perceived stress and teachers' self-efficacy. The result concludes that Grit has a strong influence on the self-efficacy of teachers. In the presence of grit, the effects of stress on Teachers' self-efficacy become zero or nonsignificant. Having a high level of grit can be incredibly beneficial in combating stress and improving self-efficacy.
6. The Model Fit Indices provide empirical validation of the literature on Grit's influence on teachers' perceived stress and self-efficacy. The proposed structural equation model's accuracy in representing the relationship between Grit, Stress, and TSE is that Grit plays a significant role in mediating the impact of the two variables. This means that the result aligns with existing literature, highlighting the importance of grit in influencing teachers' ability to cope with stress and maintain high levels of self-efficacy.

Recommendations

1. Based on the current levels of grit, perceived stress, and teacher self-efficacy among teachers, they are encouraged to do Self-Reflection (SR). Teachers are encouraged to engage in regular self-reflection practices to assess their strengths and areas for improvement. This can help teachers develop a growth mindset and continuously strive for excellence in their teaching practice.

2. Teachers need to strengthen their grit to effectively combat stress and enhance their self-efficacy. To strengthen their grit, teachers should develop a growth mindset (GM), which involves viewing challenges as opportunities for growth and learning rather than overwhelming obstacles. By adopting a growth mindset, teachers can embrace setbacks as valuable learning experiences and maintain a positive attitude even in the face of adversity.

3. The negative relationship between grit and stress suggests that cultivating grit is a protective factor against the negative effects of stress on well-being. Cultivating grit among teachers is essential for enabling them to effectively handle stress and confront the challenges of their profession with resilience and determination. One approach to foster grit among teachers is through In-service Training (INSET). INSET can include workshops focusing on coping

mechanisms, resilience, having a positive mindset, and effective problem-solving skills through Colleague Collaboration (CC). Colleague collaboration can provide opportunities for teachers to share ideas, resources, and best practices, thereby facilitating problem-solving and mutual support during challenging times. Additionally, sharing personal stories of overcoming challenges and highlighting examples of resilience and perseverance can become a regular activity within the school community. INSET may also offer stress management techniques (SMT) such as mindfulness and time management skills to equip teachers with practical strategies for coping with stress. By implementing these strategies, educational leaders can help cultivate grit among teachers, enabling them to effectively manage stress, overcome obstacles, and thrive in their profession.

4. Fostering grit among teachers to enhance their self-efficacy in various aspects of teaching can have significant benefits for both educators and students. Schools and educational institutions can support teachers in developing Grit through Professional Development Workshop (PDW), Mentorship Programs (MP), and a Supportive School Culture (SSC) that values perseverance and continuous improvement. Professional development workshops can focus on specific areas such as student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management, providing teachers with practical strategies and tools to improve their practice. Mentorship programs offer personalized support and guidance from experienced educators or coaches, helping teachers to reflect on their practice and grow professionally. Supportive School Culture includes administrators maintaining open and transparent communication channels with teachers, and providing regular updates on school policies, initiatives, and decisions that affect them. Teachers should receive constructive feedback and support from administrators, and instructional coaches to help them reflect on their practice and continuously improve their self-efficacy.

5. Implement Grit Development Programs (GDP). Schools and educational institutions should consider implementing programs aimed at developing grit among teachers. These programs can include workshops, seminars, or training sessions focused on building resilience, perseverance, and passion for long-term goals.

6. Use the developed Model equation in this study to acknowledge the importance of grit in shaping teachers' beliefs and behaviors. Educational institutions can develop targeted interventions and support systems to help teachers cultivate grit and enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. By investing in the development of Grit, schools can empower teachers to thrive in their roles and positively impact student outcomes.

The results, realizations, and recommendations of this study are poised to make a significant contribution to the UA educational research agenda. By addressing the need to enhance teachers' grit and self-efficacy, the study aims to provide valuable insights and interventions to support educators in their professional development. The study sheds light on the importance of grit and self-efficacy in the teaching profession, highlighting their role in promoting resilience, perseverance, and effectiveness among teachers. Through a deeper understanding of these concepts, educational institutions can implement targeted interventions and support mechanisms to help teachers cultivate these qualities.

Furthermore, the study's recommendations aim to provide practical strategies and interventions for managing the skills required in the teaching profession. This includes Self Reflection (SR), Growth Mindset (GM), Colleague Collaboration (CC), Stress Management Techniques (SMT), Professional Development Workshop (PDW), Mentorship Program (MP), Supportive School Culture (SSC), and Grit Development Programs (GDP) that values continuous learning and growth. By implementing these recommendations, educational stakeholders can create an environment where teachers feel empowered to overcome challenges, develop the grit necessary to effectively manage stress, and improve self-efficacy, ultimately leading to better outcomes for both teachers and learners.

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Assessing the sixth graders' achievement of the learning competencies in English: A test development and validation study

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Abstract

The present investigation is grounded in the theoretical framework of test development and validation adopted from Luoma (2001). The primary objective of this study is to develop a standardized English assessment tool for sixth-grade students that is envisioned to (1) yield outcomes and pinpoint learner proficiencies and areas for enhancement, (2) facilitate informed decisions concerning the necessity for learning reinforcement or remediation, and (3) aid educators and the academic institution in identifying both proficient and deficient domains, in the hope of furnishing invaluable perspectives for enhancing the extant English syllabus. The study's initial stage scrutinized the K–12 Language Arts Multiliteracy Curriculum Guide in English 6 to identify the learning competencies for inclusion in the achievement test. The outcome of this inquiry was the basis for the Table of Specifications (TOS). The assessment consisted of 74 test items, each presenting four options. The content comprises three distinct learning domains: vocabulary development, grammar awareness structure, and reading comprehension, interwoven with the sub-strands of reading and writing. Validation by the invited experts was done to ensure the initial draft's alignment with the DepEd learning competencies and cognitive skills and the comprehensibility of the language used for the intended users. Problematic test items were revised, and the second draft was subjected to pilot testing among sixth-grade pupils. The results were used to perform item analyses to ascertain the difficulty level, discrimination index, and plausibility of each option of the test items. Item analysis prompted another round of modifications and re-administration of the test. As a result of the tedious and rigorous process of developing an assessment instrument, seventy-four test items were deemed acceptable. The study has deduced that the newly crafted achievement test exhibits validity, practicability, and high quality as it comprehensively encompasses the three learning domains in English 6 and is highly responsive to the K–12 DepEd English Curriculum.

Keywords: *Achievement test, English learning competencies, test development and validation*

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring student progress through assessment is a fundamental aspect of the educational curriculum. It serves as a crucial means of extrapolating the learning and development of students and is widely recognized as a potent tool for improving educational outcomes and fostering societal advancement (McEwan & Wilder-Davis, 2023; Neumann et al., 2019; Yeni et al., 2019; Buckley-Walker & Lipscombe, 2022). Assessing learners helps teachers determine the rationale behind their pedagogical decisions and the effectiveness of instruction (Fisher, Jr. & Bandy, 2019).

Classroom assessments have two classifications; formative assessments and summative assessments. The primary goal of formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning,

is to gauge the learner's proficiency toward improving instruction by enhancing student learning during the learning process. Summative evaluations, also known as assessments of learning, are used to evaluate the post-instruction proficiency of the learners. It gives information concerning student achievement patterns (Isaacs & Herbert, 2018). The achievement assessment aids in evaluating the success of instruction in the classroom. Both educators and learners receive feedback from it (Kumar & Rai, 2016; Singh & Yadav, 2018).

One of the challenges encountered in classroom assessment is the issue of unsatisfactory test quality. Numerous educational assessments lack standardization and adherence to the systematic test development approach and psychometric principles (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). Several examinations administered by certain institutions have faced criticism due to their substandard quality and inability to perform their pedagogical responsibilities of assessing and evaluating pupils (Arekkuzhiyil & Professor 2021). Certain circumstances may raise concerns in the context of classroom assessment. These include delays on the part of teachers in returning corrected tasks to learners, which may hinder the provision of feedback on their performance. Additionally, inadequate motivation of students and insufficient communication with parents may also be contributing factors (Shah & Habib, 2022).

Moreover, Rezai (2022) asserts that the issue of fairness in assessment procedures has garnered considerable interest in the modern era. Good assessment tools with such a high level of validity provide precise estimates of how much pupils have learned. According to Corpuz and Santos (2019), validity refers to the degree to which a test accurately measures the construct it purports to measure.

According to CSAI (2018), for an assessment tool to be considered valid, it must exhibit accuracy in assessing the competencies of learners and reliability across various testing contexts and scores. The various forms of validity entail evidence of content-related validity, criterion-related validity, construct-related validity, and face validity. Evaluating the validity of an instrument through the use of content-related evidence is a method concerned with the content and the format of the assessment instrument. The concept of content validity concerns the extent to which the test items accurately represent the requisite knowledge of a particular subject matter. Meanwhile, criterion-related validity evidence refers to the correlation between the scores obtained from a given instrument and scores obtained from one or more additional tests. This validity is commonly known as concrete validity due to its association with a test's correlation with a tangible outcome.

On the other hand, criterion-related validity is a fundamental concept that comprises two main categories. The first classification pertains to concurrent validity, which involves evaluating the degree of correlation between the measure under scrutiny and a simultaneous outcome. The second category is predictive validity, which pertains to the ability of a particular test or measurement to predict a future outcome. Moreover, the construct-related validity evidence refers to the nature of the psychological construct or traits the tool is assessing (Corpuz & Santos, 2019).

Assessments often serve as tests of competence in quantitative research in education to assess students' achievements in the cognitive domain. According to research, multiple-choice assessments are the most commonly used methods, alongside interviews, for assessing students' comprehension of a particular concept or topic (Fenn & George 2020).

Multiple-choice test questions can be a productive and streamlined approach to evaluating educational achievements. Multiple-choice items are advantageous since students can respond more expeditiously than to essay questions (Haladyna & Rodriguez, 2013).

Consequently, assessments that employ multiple-choice items can cover a wide range of course material, thus, enhancing the assessment's validity (Brame, 2013). According to Kara and Çelikler (2015), multiple-choice questions with 2-3 options are deemed appropriate for learners in the first or second grade in grade school.

Additionally, achievement tests are a type of evaluation that aims to assess an individual's proficiency in fundamental academic domains such as reading, writing and mathematics. Similar to the regulations and protocols governing the administration of standardized assessments, outcomes derived from standardized and informal evaluations of academic achievement must be employed solely for their intended objectives. The primary aim of administering achievement tests should be to enhance instruction and the academic achievements of the students undergoing evaluation (Schneider & Mather, 2015). Moreover, the most popular version of an achievement test is a standardized assessment, one of the high-quality exams designed to evaluate the abilities and information attained at a particular grade level and acquired through organized teaching, such as instruction or training (Singh & Yadav, 2018).

For several years, educational institutions and other agencies have implemented reforms to enhance their instructional programs and improve students' academic performance. As academics have embraced numerous interdisciplinary techniques to problematize and address old and new language evaluation and learning challenges, the subject has gradually expanded in scope and sophistication over the past few decades (Aryadoust et al., 2020). The Department of Education's K-12 Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) encompasses a comprehensive set of five (5) sub-strands, which include listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. The restructured Integrated Language Arts Curriculum aligns with the prescribed content standards students are expected to achieve upon completing their fundamental education (DepEd, 2016).

Nonetheless, the requirement for high-quality and relevant assessments is at the heart of these reforms. In 2017, the Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 29, s. 2017, the so-called "Policy Guidelines on System Assessment in the K to 12 Basic Education Program" (DepEd, 2017).

In pursuit of enhancing the quality of "basic education" in the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2019) undertook an endeavor in 2018 to engage in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to obtain credible statistics for global benchmarking. According to the findings of the PISA Report, Filipino secondary school students exhibited comparatively lower performance in reading comprehension evaluations than most learners from other nations.

Furthermore, Zepeda Orozco et al., 2019 state that language testing is an integral and required component of the language curriculum. Consequently, every teacher should possess professional competency in assessment instrument design (Larenas et al., 2021) because educational evaluation competence leads to accurately defining, selecting, designing, gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and utilizing information to increase the growth and achievement of the learners (Herrera & Zambrano, 2019).

In recent years, interest in evaluating grammatical proficiency has risen. It also stems from the ability of grammar assessment to characterize competency in various contexts at diverse proficiency levels and to give language learners specific information about how well they do in grammar (Coombe et al., 2020; Purpura, 2013).

Furthermore, vocabulary plays an essential role in the growth of a child's oral language and in their eventual success in learning to read and write. For this reason, vocabulary instruction should continue playing a pivotal role in language education (Olmos, 2009) since it equips students with the knowledge necessary to acquire new words and feel comfortable using them in their everyday speech. Acquiring a rich vocabulary is paramount as it encompasses the entire lexicon necessary to access our pre-existing knowledge, articulate our thoughts, convey our messages with conviction, and acquire new ideas (Akhavan & Sadeghi, 2020).

Likewise, assessing students' reading comprehension holds great importance in providing appropriate guidance to learners in achieving a high level of reading proficiency since reading proficiency is considered a fundamental aspect of language acquisition (Borg & Edmett, 2019). In the current job market, individuals must possess sufficient competence to be considered for employment, as the prevalence of unemployment remains high.

Throughout history, the assessment test has been widely utilized as the predominant means of gauging the advancement and proficiency of cognitive ability in language acquisition. Despite the increasing prevalence of alternative evaluation techniques, most educators continue to depend on the traditional way of validating assessment instruments (Frank, 2012). To name a few "Comprehension of Written Grammar" (Cannon et al., 2016), a validated tool that assesses grammar competency for deaf students (Efeotor, 2018); "An Achievement Test for Identifying Primary School Students At Risk of Mathematics Learning Disabilities" (Filiz & Güneş, 2022); "A Standardized Achievement Test in English Grammar for Grade 9 Students (Sharma & Gupta, 2017); "A Validated Achievement Test on Matter Changing (Kara & Elikler, 2015); "Construction and Standardization of an Achievement Test in Accounting" (Rani & Ahuja, 2023); "A Standardized Achievement Test in English Grammar" (Abedi, 2002); "A Standardized Achievement Test in Science" (Bala and Dr. Singh, 2019); "The Development of an English Critical Thinking Test (ECTT)" designed to measure consistency, analysis, and inference CT skills (Hirai et al., 2022); "Validation of an Achievement Test in Araling Asyano for Grade 7 Students" that can measure the mastered and least mastered skills in the K-12 Araling Panlipunan (Ebagat & Simeon, 2017); "The Tagalog Articulation Test for Children Aged 4 to 7 Years Old in Quezon City: Development and Validation" (Cuadro, 2016); and "The Developed and Validated Philippine Music Achievement Test in Addressing the K to 12 Music Curriculum Learning Competencies" (Tabuena, 2020).

The evaluation of academic performance among students in Philippine educational institutions is through the administration of tests. Various Department of Education assessments, DepEd Order 027, s. 2022 mandates the administration of several Department of Education assessments, such as the "Early Language, Literacy, and Numeracy Assessment" (ELLNA), the "National Achievement Test for Grade 6" (NATG6), and the "National Achievement Test for Grade 10" (NATG12) (June 17, 2022 DO 027, S. 2022 – Conduct of Rapid Assessment in School Year

2021–2022 for Learning Recovery as Well as in Preparation for the 2024 Baseline System Assessment | Department of Education, n.d.).

The present research aims to devise and validate an assessment tool that would evaluate sixth-grade students' English proficiency, considering the learning competencies mandated by the K-12 Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) of the Department of Education (DepEd). The assessment purports to evaluate one's proficiency in grammar, aptitude for expanding one's lexicon, and ability to comprehend written material. The assessment tool serves multiple objectives, including providing learners with constructive feedback on their learning progress and readiness to advance to the next grade level, identifying learner competencies and learning gaps to inform decisions regarding reinforcement or remediation of learning, and aiding teachers and the school in identifying areas of strength and development. As a result, the tool provides valuable information for enhancing the current institution's English curriculum.

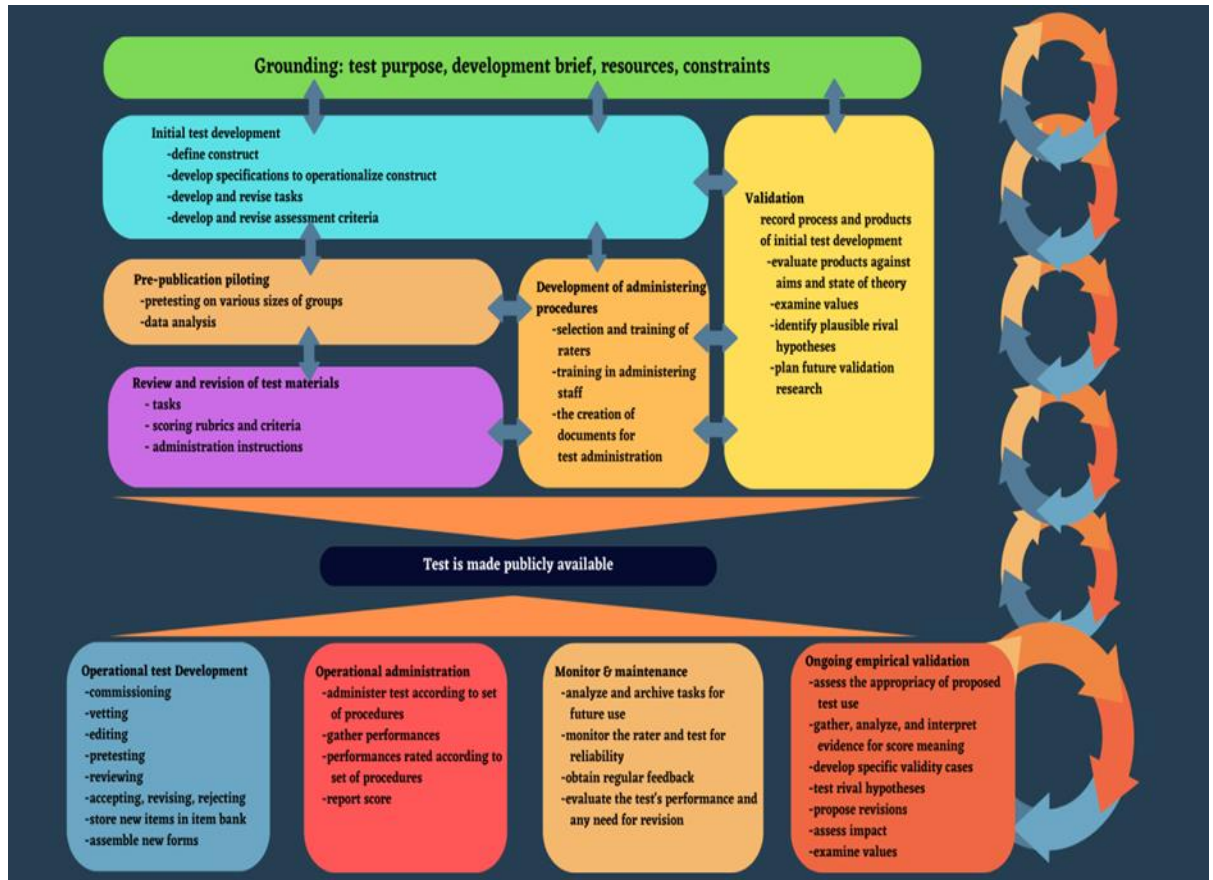
Research Objectives

The study aimed at developing a standardized assessment tool in English 6 that may yield accurate results that will give the learners constructive comments on how well they have learned and their readiness to progress to the next grade level; identify learner competencies and learning gaps that could inform decisions on whether to reinforce or remediate learning; and assist teachers and the school in identifying areas of strength and development, thus providing information for improving the current institution's English curriculum.

The test will assess pupils' English achievement in grade 6 based on the learning competencies required by the Department of Education's K12 English curriculum. It claims to test grammar competencies, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension skills. The purposes of this assessment tool are to: (a) give the learners constructive comments on how well they have learned and their readiness to progress to the next grade level; (b) identify learner competencies and learning gaps that could inform decisions whether to reinforce or remediate learning; and (c) assist teachers and the school in identifying areas of strength and development, thus providing information for improving the current institution's English curriculum. Unequivocally, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the properties of the developed English achievement test instrument in terms of the following?
 - 1.1 Expert validation of the test items vis-a-vis DepEd learning competencies
 - 1.2 Item Analysis of the test result
 - i) Difficulty Value
 - ii) Discriminative Power
 - iii) Distractor Analysis
 - 1.3 Quality of the modified test items in light of the item analysis results

Figure 1
The Research Framework (Luoma, 2001)



The present study is grounded on the theoretical framework of test development and validation procedures as espoused by Luoma (2001). The theoretical framework posits that a carefully designed test should include precisely formulated test specifications that effectively operationalize the assessed construct. Moreover, the document should also encompass defined tasks and evaluation standards. Undertake preliminary testing, followed by examination materials modification, encompassing assessment tasks, evaluation rubrics, and interpretation standards; execute systematic test administration protocols. Comparing the test results to relevant theoretical frameworks and establishing links to further validation can determine the validity of the test. Operationalizing the test can be achieved by generating new tasks. The process of operationalizing test administration pertains to the implementation and execution of the procedures and protocols entailed in the test administration. The task at hand is checking the accuracy of tests and keeping them safe for later use. The test items must undergo revalidation as an integral component of the regular validation procedure.

METHOD

This research encompasses the various phases in selecting the components that will constitute an English 6 student's achievement assessment. The preliminary stage entailed the examination of the DepEd Language Arts Multiliteracy Curriculum Guide and deciding which learning competencies should be covered. The second stage of the study was the test items development phase. The instrument underwent a series of test tryouts during the third stage. The fourth stage evaluated the test items through item analysis, while the last step included modifying and re-evaluating the revised test questions.

Planning Stage

A collection of literary works, texts, and supplementary educational resources utilized in the pedagogy of English 6 serves as a point of reference for test questions development following the guidelines set forth by the Department of Education's Curriculum Guide. During this phase, seeking assistance from subject matter experts was necessary for identifying and categorizing the English 6 learning competencies. The developed table of specifications includes thirty-five (35) learning competencies – eleven (11) competencies correspond to Grammar Skills, four (4) under Vocabulary Development, and twenty (20) fall to Reading Comprehension Skills.

The multiple-choice test was the chosen type for the instrument because, as Brame (2013) explains, this type of questioning can be an efficient and effective means of evaluating academic performance. Utilizing multiple-choice test items offers several potential advantages, such as adaptability, dependability to determine the quality of learning, and validity. Multiple-choice questions can assess a wide range of learning outcomes, from basic memorization to more advanced skills like application, analysis, and review (Corpuz et al., 2019).

Using multiple-choice test items in examinations is more reliable than essay inquiries because of their reduced vulnerability to guessing. Enhancing the number of multiple-choice items that concentrate on a particular learning objective can improve the dependability of the evaluation because the employment of objective scoring for multiple-choice test items eradicates the problems of scorer inconsistency that may affect the scoring, which usually happens when scoring essay questions (Isaacs & Herbert 2018).

The test items were constructed with four options in the multiple-choice question format. Kara and Çelikler (2015) recommend that such questions with 3-4 options are appropriate for students in the 3rd grade and beyond. Furthermore, many national and regional academic performance assessments, such as admission evaluations, standardized tests, and professional certification exams, employ the mentioned structure.

The initial iteration of the Table of Specifications (TOS) was formulated through the educational proficiencies classification in LAMC 6 and the cognitive skills based on Bloom's taxonomy of pedagogical objectives. The curriculum guide suggests that students should have grasped the basic concepts of the lessons in the lower years; hence no test item corresponds to remembering.

Test Construction Stage

After finalizing the initial version of the test blueprint, was drafting the seventy-four (74) test items. It is worth mentioning that the test items were researcher-made. Each competency

comprised two questions, except the one that involved analyzing a poem with four or more stanzas in terms of its rhymes and rhyme scheme, which consists of three items; analyzing a poem with four or more stanzas in terms of the figurative language, which consists of four test items; and determining character traits and feelings, which consists of three test items.

Upon drafting the test questionnaire, the researcher presented the developed questionnaire to three (3) teacher experts to evaluate their content validity. According to Corpuz et al. 2019, validating a designed instrument requires the participation of at least two (2) subject matter experts. The instrument was evaluated by three expert content validators. The assessment and evaluation of the test item and options' responsiveness to the specific learning competency (test validity), correspondence of the test items and mechanics to the cognitive skill (skill correspondence), and suitability of the item construction and choice of words to the level of understanding of Grade 6 pupils (language) were deemed crucial during this stage, as determined by the experts.

Corpuz et al. added that "content validity" is a degree to which the test items precisely mirror the knowledge essential for a particular subject matter. Furthermore, the content validity assessment pertains to the point whereby a given instrument comprehensively encompasses all pertinent aspects of its intended function. Establishing the representativeness of items concerning knowledge, skills, tasks, and more necessitates both item and sampling validity (Ebagat & Simeon, 2017; Nikolopoulou, 2022).

Tryout Stage

Conducting a tryout is a crucial step to ensure the validity and quality of a test as an effective assessment tool. Before the pilot testing of the developed instrument, the researcher obtained permission from the concerned university administrators, including the vice president for academic affairs and the principal. In addition, the researchers asked for consent from the subject teachers in charge of the classes that will experience interruptions during the pilot testing. The respondents' parents or legal guardians received a cover letter and a consent form, while the respondents received an assent form that informed them of the particulars of the instrument's development.

Item Analysis Stage

The item analysis phase holds significance in drafting the present achievement test. At this stage, the researcher employed statistical techniques to isolate problematic aspects of the testing procedure (Kubiszyn & Borich, 2017). The item analysis typically reports two primary statistics: item difficulty, which gauges the proportion of examinees who answered an item correctly, and item discrimination, which assesses the extent to which the test item distinguishes between examinees who are knowledgeable in the content area and those who are not (Gabuyo, 2013). The item analysis included an evaluation of the distractors. The process of distractor analysis involves assessing the plausibility of erroneous alternatives, (Shin et al., 2019).

After organizing the results of the test, the item analysis commenced. Students' scores were arranged from highest to lowest. The highest 27% and lowest 27% of the scores were classified. The remaining 46 % of the population whose score fell in the middle range of the scoring were excluded from item analysis.

The item analysis template used the Gronlund and Linn (1990) formula for calculating the difficulty and discriminatory indices. The equation for calculating the difficulty index is $D = (Ru + RL) / T$. On the other hand, the following equation calculates the discriminatory index: $Di = (Ru - RL) / 1/2T$, where Ru represents the number of individuals in the upper group who provided a correct response to the item, RL refers to the number of individuals in the lower group who responded the test item correctly, T corresponds to the total number of individuals who responded, and $1/2T$ relates to half of the total number of individuals who answered the test question.

The test items with difficulty indices of 0.00-0.20 were interpreted as very difficult items; 0.21-0.40 as difficult items; 0.41-0.60 as moderately difficult; 0.61-0.80 as easy; and 0.81-1.00 as very easy test items. Meanwhile, discriminatory indices of 0.00-0.20 were interpreted as moderately discriminating, 0.21-0.60 as discriminating; and 0.61-1.00 as very discriminating.

Following item analysis, the test items were classified into seven distinct categories. Five (5) items were entirely accepted based on their difficulty and discrimination index. Seventeen (17) items were accepted with minor modifications, five (5) items were accepted with minor changes, and twenty-nine (29) items were accepted with minor modifications. Taking eight (8) items necessitated substantial modifications to the stem or options. Seven (7) items required substantial revisions or were recommended for rejection, whereas one (1) item was discarded entirely.

Likewise, to enhance the quality of the alternatives provided in the examination, distractor analysis was employed. The methodology of options analysis entailed quantifying the frequency of selection for a given distractor among the student population. The present study sought to ascertain the extent of discrimination between the highest and lowest scorers in each response. The options analysis was subjected to interpretation, considering two salient points as posited by Gierl et al. (2017).

Modification Stage

In the modification stage, items that were very easy or and were moderately or non-discriminating were modified. Furthermore, the researcher implemented requisite modifications to the Table of Specifications (TOS) to align and fit the revised version of the achievement test.

The modified test items were pilot tested to the randomly selected section in grade 6. No answer sheet was provided. The answers were manually checked.

After the checking and scoring process, the validity of the test items was assessed using the identical methodology of item analysis applied in scrutinizing the outcomes of the initial trial.

Following the carrying out of the item analysis, the result classified the test items into three distinct groups. The study yielded results indicating that a single question was accepted as it was, whereas three test items underwent acceptance with minor modifications, and four were accepted with slight revisions.

The researcher utilized the outcomes of the item analyses to formulate the final version of the achievement test tool. Furthermore, the researcher incorporated necessary changes in the test specifications to conform to and accommodate the ultimate configuration of the assessment tool.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the research instrument's evaluation, organized into two core stages: (1) expert content validation of the test items against the Department of Education (DepEd) learning competencies and cognitive domains, and (2) item analysis detailing the subsequent modifications made to optimize test validity, linguistic proficiency, and structural integrity.

Expert Content Validation and Alignment

A panel of education experts evaluated the test items across four distinct operational quarters based on three primary criteria: Relevance to the Learning Competency (Test Validity [A]), Correspondence to the Cognitive Skill [B], and Language Proficiency [C]. Items were rated on a 4-point scale, where higher scores indicated strong alignment.

First and Second Quarter Item Mapping

For the First Quarter, 25 items were developed to measure 11 DepEd learning competencies. The items spanned four cognitive levels: understanding (n = 3), applying (n = 8), analyzing (n = 12), and evaluating (n = 2). For the Second Quarter, 16 items were mapped against 8 competencies, distributed across understanding (n = 4), applying (n = 6), analyzing (n = 2), and evaluating (n = 4).

Third and Fourth Quarter Item Mapping

The Third Quarter comprised 16 items targeting 8 competencies across understanding (n = 8), applying (n = 1), analyzing (n = 2), and evaluating (n = 5). The Fourth Quarter contained 16 items assessing 8 competencies across understanding (n = 5), applying (n = 3), analyzing (n = 8), and evaluating (n = 4).

Table 1 summarizes the expert validation scores and the strategic actions taken for items requiring adjustment across all four quarters.

Table 1

Expert Validation Ratings and Structural Actions for Targeted Test Items

Quarter	DepEd Learning Competency	Item No.	Cognitive Skill	Validity (A)	Alignment (B)	Language (C)	Action Taken / Editorial Rationale
1 st	Use modals in clear/coherent sentences	2	Applying	4.0	4.0	3.5	Modified options to eliminate dual correct answers.
		38	Applying	4.0	4.0	3.5	Revised distractors to remove unintended positive cues.
2 nd	Combine ideas using subordinate conjunctions	39	Applying	4.0	4.0	3.5	Revised the stem to ensure a singular, clear correct choice.

Quarter	DepEd Learning Competency	Item No.	Cognitive Skill	Validity (A)	Alignment (B)	Language (C)	Action Taken / Editorial Rationale
3rd	Use adverbs of intensity, manner, place, time	6	Applying	4.0	4.0	3.5	Adjusted options to avoid regional dialect ambiguities.
	Evaluate narratives based on theme development	74	Evaluating	4.0	4.0	3.5	Refined choice phrasing to eliminate overlapping options.
	Use capitalization and punctuation rules	1	Analyzing	3.0	4.0	4.0	Re-aligned stems to match punctuation-specific metrics.
		36	Evaluating	3.5	4.0	4.0	Refined stem prompts for grammatical precision.
	Identify sentence types according to use	10	Applying	4.0	4.0	3.5	Replaced "sentence" with "statement" to reduce confusion.
	Clarify word meanings using a dictionary	35	Understanding	4.0	4.0	3.5	Standardized options into parallel verb phrases.
	Determine problem and solution in text	67	Evaluating	4.0	4.0	3.0	Rewrote options to establish a clear, single correct answer.
	Summarize information in texts	65	Evaluating	4.0	4.0	3.0	Shortened option lengths to mitigate cognitive fatigue.
	Sequence events in a story	70	Evaluating	3.5	4.0	3.5	Condensed sequencing elements from 8 to 4 events.
	Infer meanings using root words/affixes	17	Understanding	4.0	4.0	3.5	Restructured the stem for better linguistic clarity.
4th	Respond appropriately to authentic texts	33	Evaluating	3.5	4.0	4.0	Shortened long options to remove length-biased cues.
	Make inferences from explicit/implicit info	19	Analyzing	4.0	4.0	3.5	Standardized options to begin with lower-case letters.

Quarter	DepEd Learning Competency	Item No.	Cognitive Skill	Validity (A)	Alignment (B)	Language (C)	Action Taken / Editorial Rationale
	Draw conclusions from explicit/implicit info	14	Analyzing	4.0	4.0	3.5	Adjusted distractor phrasing and standardized lower-case style.

DISCUSSION

The development of the English achievement test for Grade 6 pupils involved a systematic process of planning, drafting, validation, and pilot testing. Each item and alternative choice underwent rigorous statistical and qualitative analysis to ensure structural integrity and validity. The resulting 74-item multiple-choice instrument is designed to provide precise diagnostic feedback regarding student mastery and academic readiness.

A high-quality assessment tool must fulfill established psychometric criteria, including validity, appropriate item difficulty, optimal discriminative power, practicability, and standardization (Salkind, 2022; Yogiraj, n.d.; Blog, 2001). This paper details the evaluation of these attributes for the developed instrument.

Psychometric Properties and Analysis

1. Validity and Alignment

The test items align with the 35 learning competencies outlined in the Department of Education (DepEd) K-12 Language Arts and Multiliteracy Curriculum Guide, spanning vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension. Content validity was established via an expert review panel. The initial evaluation yielded a mean validity score of 3.97 out of 4.00. Based on expert recommendations, the stems for Questions 1 and 36 were simplified, an option for Question 33 was improved, and Question 70 was streamlined to match the comprehension level of Grade 6 pupils. High validity ensures that test scores accurately estimate student achievement and hold educational significance (CSAI, 2018; Pangilinan et al., 2011).

The 74 items were mapped to the cognitive domains of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy to balance lower- and higher-order thinking skills (Sohail, 2015). The item distribution across these domains is presented below:

Table 2
Mapping of Test Items to Cognitive Domains

Cognitive Skill	<i>n</i>	Specific Item Numbers
Understanding (<i>Lower-Order</i>)	20	12, 13, 15, 17, 18, 26, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 48, 49, 54, 59, 60, 61, 69, 71, 73

Cognitive Skill	<i>n</i>	Specific Item Numbers
Applying (<i>Higher-Order</i>)	18	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45
Evaluating (<i>Higher-Order</i>)	21	1, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 37, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 62, 63, 68, 64, 72

Note: The remaining items from the 74-item pool correspond to the broader higher-order thinking framework evaluated by the panel.

2. Distractor and Structural Analysis

To minimize ambiguity and ensure that distractors are plausible yet distinctly incorrect, items 2, 6, 35, 38, 67, and 73 were targeted for simplification. Methodological literature indicates that functional distractors must attract 5% or more of lower-performing students (Shin et al., 2019).

The instrument features 74 items with four options each, totaling 296 choices. Distractor analysis revealed that 288 out of the 296 choices functioned effectively, attracting selection rates between 5% and 79% from the pilot cohort. The 8 options that failed to meet the 5% selection threshold were modified in the final draft.

Additionally, items 14, 19, 39, 65, and 70 were revised to correct syntactic flaws and verbosity. Clear, parallel, and grammatically congruent alternatives prevent astute examinees from relying on structural flaws (such as differences in option length or syntax) to guess the correct answer ("Writing Good Multiple Choice Test Questions", n.d.).

3. Difficulty Index

The item difficulty index represents the proportion of examinees who answered an item correctly. The developed test displayed item difficulty indices ranging from 0.23 (highly challenging) to 0.87 (highly accessible).

The instrument achieved an average difficulty index of 0.57, representing a moderate difficulty level. This aligns with psychometric recommendations identifying an overall difficulty of approximately 0.50 as optimal for maximizing test discrimination (Cohen-Swerdlik, 2009; Febriani & Yusuf, 2022). While traditional standards classify indices below 0.30 as difficult, between 0.30 and 0.70 as moderate, and above 0.70 as easy, an overall range of 0.20 to 0.80 serves as an acceptable psychometric framework.

4. Discriminative Power

The discrimination index evaluates an item's capacity to distinguish between high-performing and low-performing students, operating on a scale from -1.00 to +1.00. Values ≥ 0.30 indicate strong discrimination, while values down to 0.20 remain within an acceptable range. The developed instrument achieved a highly acceptable mean discrimination index of 0.39 across its 74 items.

Despite the strong overall mean, four items (23, 52, 32, and 47) exhibited individual discrimination indices below 0.20:

Items 23 and 52: These items assessed the analysis of sound devices in poetry. They produced low difficulty indices (0.23 and 0.24, respectively), indicating that the items were highly challenging. The low discrimination resulted from confusing question phrasing and student unfamiliarity with the terminology, which led to guessing. These questions were subsequently modified to improve clarity.

Item 32: This item required students to evaluate the tone and mood of a passage. While the keyed response was "humorous," contextual factors led students to select a distractor associated with legal proceedings. Option D was modified to eliminate this thematic ambiguity.

Item 47: This item required students to differentiate sentence structures. It presented a difficulty index of 0.32 (challenging). Because the low discrimination was attributed to a lack of pupil mastery rather than structural defects in the question or options, the item was retained in its original formulation.

Practicability and Standardization

1. Practicability

Practicability dictates that an instrument must be cost-effective, easy to administer, simple to score, easy to interpret, and appropriately timed (Salkind, 2022). Multiple-choice testing satisfies these criteria by efficiently measuring a broad range of knowledge domains, skills, and aptitudes within a standardized testing window (Shin et al., 2019).

2. Standardization

Standardization requires uniform administration procedures, ensuring that all participants receive identical questions, instructions, and scoring criteria (Blog, 2001; MYP Assessment Standardization, 2020). Beyond internal instrument design, environmental and socioemotional factors influence performance consistency (Green, 2018; Arnold, 2022). To safeguard data reliability, this study prioritized standardized testing conditions—including appropriate lighting, ventilation, acoustics, physical arrangement, and administrative discipline—to maximize examinee comfort and limit external variance.

Educational Application and Quality Assurance

The combination of expert validation, distractor adjustments, and item analysis confirms the high quality of the assessment tool. The test provides reliable data to identify student strengths and deficiencies across grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

When implemented as a diagnostic pre-test at the start of the school year, it highlights competencies requiring immediate instructional focus, preventing the redundant duplication of mastered content. This diagnostic application supports the spiral curriculum model, which relies on the iterative, progressive reinforcement of core competencies over time to deepen student comprehension (Resurreccion & Adanza, 2016).

Conclusions

The development of the Grade 6 English Achievement Test demonstrated that producing a valid and reliable assessment tool requires a combination of researcher construction expertise, content validator competence, and examinee credibility. Test construction is a rigorous, iterative process involving content delineation, Table of Specifications design, item generation, pilot testing, item analysis, and refinement. To execute this process effectively, researchers and educators must possess deep familiarity with questioning techniques and statistical item analysis, and maintain direct oversight of test administration to control external variables.

Furthermore, autonomous verification is insufficient. Independent expert panels are required to evaluate item alignment with learning competencies, cognitive dimensions, and linguistic accessibility. Finally, pilot-testing requires a large, conscientious sample of students who are given sufficient time to engage with the text without fatigue, ensuring that the resulting psychometric indices are credible and stable.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following actions are recommended:

Diagnostic Implementation: Administer the developed instrument at the beginning of the Grade 6 academic year to pinpoint learning gaps and guide instructional focus, or at the end of the academic term to measure cumulative competency attainment.

Methodological Framework for Other Fields: Utilize this test development process as a baseline model for constructing valid, reliable instruments in subjects beyond English, adapting to updates within the evolving K-12 educational curriculum.

Remediation Mapping: Apply test results to identify specific competencies where Grade 6 pupils demonstrate deficiencies, using this data to design targeted remedial exercises and intervention programs.

Expanded Testing: Administer the instrument across wider public and private school networks in Pampanga to evaluate its regional stability and performance.

Establishment of an Item Bank: Collaborate with English language educators and researchers to assemble a verified repository of standardized test items focused on grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension to streamline future test construction.

Professional Development: Provide comprehensive institutional training for educators on psychometric test construction, expert validation protocols, and item analysis to improve the quality of classroom-level assessments. **Continuous Optimization:** Re-administer the instrument in future research cohorts using the test-retest method to establish long-term reliability coefficients, and subject the items to ongoing re-validation to maintain high scientific validity.

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“Exploring public secondary school administrators’ practices and teachers’ perspectives and experiences in the new normal classroom observation”: Inputs for enhancing instructional leadership”

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Abstract

This study investigates the practices of public secondary school administrators and the perspectives and experiences of teachers regarding classroom observation in the context of the new normal. Ten school administrators and twenty-eight school teachers participated in a case study, employing semi-structured interviews and Colaizzi's method for data analysis.

Findings revealed two major themes: For school administrators, the primary challenge identified was "Navigating Connectivity Challenges in Virtual Classroom Observation." This theme underscores the difficulties administrators face in effectively observing classrooms in virtual settings, including issues related to technological infrastructure and internet connectivity. For teachers, the predominant theme was "Evolving Pedagogical Paradigms in Digital Education." Teachers expressed the need to adapt their teaching methods to align with the demands of digital education, emphasizing the importance of innovative approaches and strategies.

Based on these findings, the study proposes several recommendations to enhance instructional leadership: Enhanced Professional Development: Targeted professional development initiatives should be implemented to address the challenges and adaptations faced by school administrators and teachers in the new normal classroom observation. Training sessions and workshops can focus on technical issues, observation modalities and innovative approaches.

Educational institutions should prioritize strategic technology integration to facilitate seamless classroom observation experiences. This includes investing in infrastructure, reliable internet connectivity, and user-friendly digital platforms. Promotion of Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Collaboration and knowledge sharing among teachers should be promoted to foster a culture of continuous improvement. Platforms for educators to exchange best practices and collaborate on innovative teaching strategies can enhance professional growth. Curriculum and Instructional Design Adaptation: Educational stakeholders should consider adapting curriculum and instructional design to align with observation-friendly pedagogical approaches. This involves prioritizing engagement, interaction, and alignment with digital learning environments. Empowerment of Educators: Educators should be empowered to navigate evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education.

Keywords: Classroom observation, instructional leadership, new normal, perspectives, practices

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the landscape of education has undergone a seismic shift, catalyzed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. As educational institutions grapple with the challenges posed by remote and hybrid learning modalities, the role of instructional leadership in shaping effective teaching practices has become increasingly paramount.

The emergence of the new normal in education has brought to the forefront a host of challenges and opportunities. With the sudden transition to remote and hybrid learning environments, educators and administrators alike have had to adapt rapidly to ensure continuity in teaching and learning.

According to Mueller (2017), "Education is one of the most important ingredients to a happy, successful and constructive life." This statement shows how powerful education is for the life of people. Muskan (2017) states that education is an important weapon to succeed in life and something that nobody can steal. It is not only about the lessons in books, but also the lessons in life (Dolumbia, 2013). According to Pearson (2019), governments all over the world invest more in education for their people to be globally competent.

In traditional education, assessment focuses more on the output of the learners than the teaching-learning process. In the 21st century education, learners are involved in the assessment process by analyzing their own various learning styles and assessing their own outputs (Acar-Edol & Yildizh, 2018). Children are the future hope to take good care of the world. This is the reason why they need to be educated, so the present generation can entrust them.

Education helps people in planning future career (Sibuyi, 2016). Teachers play a very important role in molding the learners. They are commonly known as the ones who teach but their job is beyond teaching since they have multiple jobs. According to Meier (2018), the words that the teacher utter in front of their students have a lasting impact on them. Teaching is a rewarding profession when the students succeed in the future.

According to research, the assessment methods of teachers have a big impact on the academic achievement, classroom activities, beliefs and perspectives of the learners (Acar-Edol & Yildizh, 2018). Eggen & Kauchack (1996) states that the teachers must have mastery of the subject matter to deliver it properly. Teachers unite with the principal in providing and ensuring quality education to the learners. Principals or School heads are the ones who supervise schools. According to Cetin (2018), supervision has three types, and these are classical supervision, modern supervision and contemporary supervision.

A principal should have good rapport with the teachers, students and other stakeholders of school. Principals have variety of roles and responsibilities every day. Primary roles of a school head are: assess teaching, monitor students, encourage parents' involvement, and administer school budget (Dowd, 2018). All school staff should report about their job so the school administrator will be updated (Bruens, 2012). Post conference needs to address strengths and weaknesses. School heads help the teachers to improve more in the field of teaching and learn effective strategies. (Meador, 2019).

Hallinger (2011) discusses the principles of instructional leadership, emphasizing the role of school leaders in promoting a culture of continuous improvement and student-centered learning. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, providing support and resources for teachers, monitoring teaching practices, and fostering a collaborative school culture. This aligns with the findings of Robinson et al. (2008), who highlight the importance of instructional leadership in improving student achievement and creating a positive learning environment.

According to Swales (1990) and Swales & Feak (2012), instructional leadership plays a crucial role in guiding and supporting educators to enhance teaching practices and student

outcomes. Additionally, the review by Belcher (2009) emphasizes the significance of relating new research to previous studies to ensure publication in reputable international journals.

According to Green and Dixon (1999), observation is a common behavior of a human being. People are observing in order to learn positive and negative matters. Othman (2017) states that we have different reasons on observation. According to Reed and Bergemann (1992), classroom observation is one important key to know the methods in teaching, the organization of a classroom, and how students perform in the classroom environment.

In many countries in Asia, they practice demonstration lessons with the school heads and even peer observation as part of professional development. In area of North America, they are giving the teachers an opportunity to observe other teachers with the same subject area either in their school or other schools (Olenka, 2009). Classroom observation is for the improvement of the teachers, students and the quality of education (Acar-Erdol & Fildizh, 2018). The word "assessment" was defined as a tool to know if the teaching strategies are effective in students' learning (Natriello, 1987). Halpin & Kieffer (2015) states that in research, teacher's evaluation is equivalent to a total rating, a basis on how effective they are.

The new evaluation system requires the school head to observe the teachers two to three times every school year (Doherty & Jacob, 2015). According to Tang and Chow (2007), the feedback detailed checklist nowadays is a modified version created by the Carnegie foundation for the improvement of classroom observation between the school head and the teacher. Joe et al., (2013) states that classroom observation is now being used as a topic in research to improve the quality of education and the professional development of school heads and teachers. Mashburn et al., (2018) said that schools are practicing classroom observation to rate teachers so the school head will make decisions on how teachers will improve their teaching strategies for quality education.

The feedbacks of the lower stakes are mostly being used in conducting research about classroom observation (Allen et al., 2012; Mashburn et al., 2012). The decisions of the high-stakes after the classroom observation includes firing the teacher, increasing of compensation, and other teacher bonuses (QRLS; Tout, Zaslow, Halle & Forry, 2009). Even without trainings, raters' severity levels still can change. Though this topic exists, they cannot measure the error in the subscale scores (Casabianca et al., 2014).

In the Philippine Standards for Teachers-Results based Performance Management System, the classroom observation is now more standardized and objective. The indicators were agreed upon the evaluators and the teachers themselves. It ensured teachers' preparedness for they already know what to prepare and expect from the classroom observation (DepEd Resources, 2020).

One way to assess students' learning is through their delivery of knowledge and skills. Researchers explore variety of assessment to students' understanding of the knowledge, and how much they have learned (Dunlosky et al., 2013). In literature, it was shown that there is a need to improve the assessment strategies of educators. This is to not only basing a valid assessment on a single-test scores since it is not 100% reliable assessment (Sambell, McDowell & Brown, 1997). It is said that one of the tools to be used to classroom observation is ethnography (Green & Dixon, 1999).

In most classroom observations, teachers are using technology in delivering the subject matter. According to studies, the technology and equipment of the school are just contributed by

the administrators, teachers or parents. It is important that students must know the uses of the technology in school. In a study, it was found out that out of 200 elementary and secondary schools, only 2% of class time that students can use computers. There are 1,315 students from middle school from 220 mathematics classroom were observed, and it was found out that only 25% of the class time where they can use calculators.

Based from a survey, 20 principals were good on the checklist in the classroom observation evaluation form. A new assessment system which is The Holistic Integrated Classroom Observation Assessment Guide was proposed. It focuses on three categories: classroom environment, teaching strategies, and student assessment.

It is stated in the DepEd Memorandum DM-PHROD-2021-0010, also known as “Guidelines on the Implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System for School Year 2020-2021 & 2021-2022, there must be 2 classroom observations for the entire school year (DepEdClick, 2021). There are three options on how the teachers will be observed, and these are: an online observation of online synchronous teaching; if option 1 is not possible, an observation of a video lesson that is SLM-based (Self-Learning Module) or MELC-aligned (Most Essential Learning Competency); and if options 1 and 2 are not possible, an observation of a demonstration teaching via LAC.

According to Castillo (2021), based on the findings of her study about the perceptions and experiences of the Junior High School teachers on the New Normal classroom observation, the researcher concluded that classroom observation is generally for compliance in the service though it serve important purposes; stable internet connection plays a vital role in the success of a classroom observation in the new normal set-up; the mastery of the lesson results in a smooth and successful teaching demonstration.

Caratiquit and Pablo (2021) concluded in their study that classroom observation is a way to enhance teaching skills; the teachers may reflect about the effective strategies to be used in the new normal classroom observation; gadgets such as phone, tablet or laptop and stable internet connection play an important role in the new normal classroom observation; in the preparation of a video lesson, the highly recommended video editing software are Filmora, KineMaster, Power Director and VivaCut.

The primary objective of this thesis is to determine the experiences of school administrators in the conduct of classroom observation during the pandemic and in the new normal. Additionally, it aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of classroom teachers regarding the practice of classroom observation in the new normal. By elucidating the perspectives of both administrators and teachers, this study seeks to identify areas for improvement in instructional leadership and inform strategies for enhancing teaching effectiveness in the digital age.

The findings of this thesis are expected to contribute significantly to the body of knowledge on instructional leadership and classroom observation in the new normal. By shedding light on the practices and perspectives of administrators and teachers, this study will offer valuable insights for policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of teaching and learning in the digital era. Ultimately, the inputs garnered from this research endeavor will serve as a catalyst for enhancing instructional leadership and fostering excellence in teaching practices amidst the ongoing challenges of the new normal.

METHOD

Qualitative method was utilized for the study, specifically the case study was used to describe the participant-administrators' practices in new normal classroom observation and the participant-teachers' perspectives and experiences on new normal classroom observation.

Cherry (2021) defines case study as an in-depth study of one person, group, or event. It also includes every aspect of the subject's life; the background or history is analyzed to seek patterns and causes of behavior. Case studies can be used in the fields such as education, psychology, political science, social work, medicine and anthropology.

The present study classifies under the qualitative type that used the case study design to describe the experiences of the participant-thesis writers. A case study, according to Creswell and Guetterman (2019) on that premise, the present research deems it appropriate to adopt the case study method to achieve its set objectives.

The choice of a case study method for this research on new normal classroom observation practices of the administrators and perspectives of teachers allows for a detailed exploration of the subject matter within its real-life context. By focusing on participant-administrators' practices and participant-teachers' perspectives, the case study approach enables a holistic examination of backgrounds, motivations, and challenges related to classroom observation.

Interview questions were purposefully designed based on the specific research objectives, and duly validated by experts to ensure its appropriateness and clarity. The researcher formulated main questions and 10 guiding questions for both school administrators and teacher participants.

The research instrument includes a structured set of questions aimed at gathering detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of educators regarding classroom observation during the pandemic and in the new normal. The questions are designed to elicit responses that shed light on the challenges, recommendations, preferences, and perceived impact of classroom observation practices in the evolving educational landscape.

Overall, the research instrument is structured to gather comprehensive data on the experiences, perspectives, and recommendations of both administrators and teachers regarding classroom observation practices during the pandemic and in the new normal educational setting. The questions are designed to provide valuable insights into the effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements in classroom observation practices in response to the changing educational landscape.

The use of Google Forms as the data collection tool was approved by the University of the Assumption Ethics Board (UAREB) for ethical purposes. Google Forms was chosen due to its accessibility and convenience for both the researcher and participants.

The Google Form consisted of a series of questions, including main questions and guide questions, aimed at gathering detailed insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives. The form was structured to allow participants to select their preferred method of response, either through a Google Form or a virtual interview via Google Meet or Zoom.

To ensure ethical compliance, the Google Form included an informed consent form that participants were required to review and sign before proceeding with the questions. The form also provided participants with the option to edit their responses prior to the research's next step, ensuring that they had the opportunity to review and make any necessary changes to their answers.

Overall, the use of Google Forms as the data collection tool was a strategic and ethical choice for this study, allowing for the collection of valuable data while ensuring the privacy and consent of all participants.

Participants in this study were provided with a comprehensive orientation detailing the nature and purpose of the research, ensuring transparency and understanding. Confidentiality protocols were strictly adhered to, guaranteeing the protection of personal information shared during the study.

In the pursuit of understanding how educators are navigating the new normal classroom observation, the researcher focused on the Arayat West District in Pampanga. The selection of this district was strategic, as it provided a diverse range of perspectives and experiences that were essential for a comprehensive exploration of the study's objectives.

These criteria were designed to capture insights from administrators and teachers who have direct knowledge and experience with the new normal classroom observation practices within the district. The aim was to gather perspectives from educators who are deeply engaged in navigating the challenges and opportunities presented by the evolving educational landscape.

The ten public secondary school administrators who participated in the study represented a rich tapestry of ages and experience. The years of service for these administrators mirrored this variety. The teaching faculty also reflected a spectrum of ages.

The recent changes and challenges in the educational system, including the shift to online and distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, have prompted the need for research on new normal classroom observation. The ongoing crisis caused by the pandemic has forced the education sector to rapidly transition to online platforms, impacting over 1.2 billion learners globally.

This sudden shift has necessitated the evaluation of teaching and learning processes through online class observation to ensure quality education delivery in the new normal. Moreover, the intermittent suspension of face-to-face classes due to heat waves or extremely hot weather conditions has further emphasized the importance of asynchronous online classes.

The research on new normal classroom observation becomes crucial in this context as it provides a structured framework for assessing teaching effectiveness, student participation, and overall learning outcomes in the online environment. By exploring the dynamics of online class observation and its impact on instructional practices and student engagement, the study aims to address the evolving needs of the educational system in adapting to the challenges posed by the pandemic and other external factors like extreme weather conditions. This research is essential for enhancing instructional leadership, improving teaching methodologies, and ensuring the continuity of quality education delivery in the face of unforeseen disruptions.

As a case study, data were gathered, organized and interpreted following these steps as reflected in Colaizzi's thematic analysis. Colaizzi's thematic analysis is a rigorous qualitative research method designed to uncover and analyze the underlying themes present in participants' responses or experiences.

FINDINGS

School Administrators' Practices and Experiences in the New Normal Classroom Observation

Following the Colaizzi's thematic analysis; 2 subthemes and 1 major theme emerged:

Major Theme: Navigating Connectivity Challenges in Virtual Classroom Observation

Based on the subthemes 1 and 2, the researcher was able to come up with a major theme. As educational institutions transitioned to remote learning modalities during the pandemic, classroom observation practices underwent a transformation, shifting towards virtual platforms such as online teaching.

While educators expressed preferences for online teaching due to its potential for witnessing teacher-student interaction and learning processes, the reality of internet connectivity issues posed significant limitations. Despite efforts to utilize various virtual modalities, such as video lessons and live online classes, the overarching challenge remained the unstable internet connection, hindering the smooth execution of classroom observations.

In response to these challenges, recommendations for improving classroom observation experiences were made, focusing on leveraging technological advancements and exploring alternative observation methods. However, the fundamental issue of internet connectivity persisted, underscoring the need for comprehensive solutions to address this critical barrier to effective virtual classroom observations.

Ultimately, navigating connectivity challenges in virtual classroom observation necessitates collaborative efforts, technological innovations, and systemic support to ensure equitable access and reliable connectivity for all stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning process.

Subtheme 1: Challenges and Adaptations in Classroom Observation

There is a consensus on encountering technical issues such as poor internet connectivity during online classroom observations. Concerns about the effectiveness of certain observation modalities, such as video lessons, due to their perceived limitations in facilitating interaction and assessing teaching effectiveness.

Subtheme 2: Flexibility and Innovation in New Normal Classroom Observation

Participants believe in the importance of embracing flexibility and innovation in education, particularly in the face of unprecedented challenges like those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. By leveraging diverse observation methods and technological tools, educators can enhance teaching effectiveness, promote student engagement, and ensure equitable access to quality education in the new normal classroom environment.

Teachers Perspectives and Experiences in the New Normal Classroom Observation

Following the Colaizzi's thematic analysis; 2 subthemes and 1 major theme emerged:

Major Theme: Evolving Pedagogical Paradigms in Digital Education

This encapsulates the transformative shift in educational practices brought about by the integration of digital technologies, particularly evident in the realm of classroom observation methods during the new normal.

Subtheme 1: Preferences in New Normal Classroom Observation Methods

Participants expressed preferences based on factors such as engagement, ease of use, interaction with students, and similarity to traditional classroom settings.

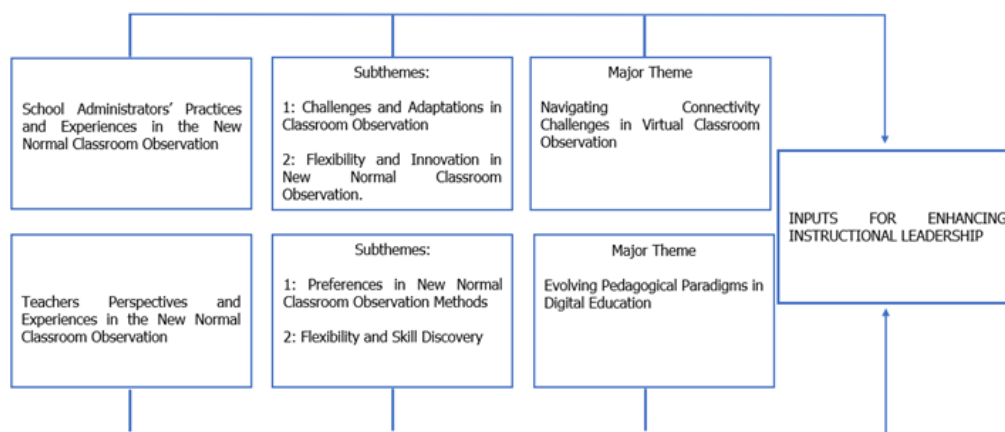
Subtheme 2: Flexibility and Skill Discovery

This subtheme encapsulates the perspective of teachers regarding the advantages of the New Normal Classroom Observation. It highlights how educators perceive the shift towards digital observation methods as an opportunity to enhance their flexibility and discover their skills.

Summary of Findings

Figure 1

Schematic Form of the Summary of Findings



DISCUSSION

The "new normal" in education refers to the changes and adaptations that have been made to teaching and learning practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes the widespread adoption of remote and online learning, as well as new methods of assessment and evaluation.

In the context of this study, the new normal classroom observation practices refer to the ways in which educators are navigating these changes and adapting their observation practices to the virtual and remote learning environment. This may include the use of new technologies and tools for observation, as well as new strategies for providing feedback and support to teachers.

Overall, the new normal in education is about creating, sculpting, and finessing minds, mentalities, and identities, promoting a style of thought about humans, or 'mashing up' and 'making up' the future of people. It is about embodying care, inclusion, and equity, and forging stronger school community and external partnerships to support teachers, students, and families during remote learning.

The new normal classroom observation refers to the shift from the traditional in-person classroom observation to the utilization of flexible methods, including video lessons, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and online classes. During the pandemic, the Department of Education reduced the number of classroom observations from four to two, allowing for these alternative modalities to be used.

The new normal setting of remote and virtual learning has revolutionized classroom observation practices, necessitating a shift towards virtual platforms to ensure continuity in educational assessment and evaluation. This transition, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and further reinforced by disruptions like extreme weather conditions leading to online classes, underscores the critical role of effective virtual observation in maintaining teaching quality and student engagement.

In response to the challenges posed by the new normal setting, the study's recommendations for professional development, collaborative practices, and technology integration offer a strategic roadmap for educators and administrators to navigate virtual classroom observation successfully. By embracing these recommendations and fostering a culture of adaptability and skill development, stakeholders in education can ensure the continued growth and development of students and educators in the digital era, fostering a dynamic and effective learning environment even amidst unforeseen disruptions like extreme weather conditions that necessitate online class modalities.

Prior to the pandemic, many schools had well-established pre-observation agreements in place, where administrators and teachers would meet to discuss the purpose, focus, and logistics of the upcoming classroom observation. These agreements often included details such as the observation timeline, the specific teaching strategies or student behaviors to be observed, the data collection methods, and the feedback and follow-up processes.

Before the pandemic, the review of detailed lesson plans was a standard practice during pre-observation conferences between administrators and teachers. These plans delineated specific learning goals, content, instructional methods, and assessment techniques intended for lessons.

To further strengthen the discussion and ensure the insights gathered are grounded in relevant literature, it is important to incorporate research on instructional leadership. The literature on instructional leadership provides valuable frameworks and perspectives that can enhance the analysis and application of the findings from this study.

The traditional instructional leadership literature has primarily focused on the role of the principal as the central figure in driving instructional improvement (Hallinger, 2005). This body of work emphasizes the principal's responsibilities in areas such as defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school climate.

The concept of "digital leadership" has also emerged as an important consideration in the modern educational landscape (Sheninger, 2014). Digital leadership encompasses the skills and

practices required to effectively integrate technology into teaching and learning, as well as the use of technology to enhance administrative and leadership functions.

Additionally, research on organizational conditions for effective instructional leadership highlights the significance of creating collaborative environments, providing targeted professional development, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). These factors can enable school leaders to more effectively support teachers in enhancing their instructional practices and promoting student learning outcomes.

By integrating these instructional leadership perspectives into the discussion, the study can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, adaptations, and opportunities related to classroom observation practices in the new normal. This approach can inform the development of robust instructional leadership strategies and support systems that empower educators to maintain effective teaching and learning, even in the face of evolving educational contexts.

The insights gathered from the study remain highly relevant, even as we continue to navigate the evolving educational landscape. This is particularly true given the recent announcements regarding the suspension of face-to-face classes due to a variety of factors, including scorching heat during the summer months, heavy rains and persistent flooding caused by typhoons during the rainy season, lack or decrease of available transportation modes to school due to public utility vehicle (PUV) strikes, and the potential for another unforeseen pandemic.

In conducting this study, a researcher-made instrument, validated by two field experts, was utilized through a Google Form to collect data. The form, comprising a main question and 10 guide questions, aimed to capture participants' perspectives on new normal classroom observation practices. During data gathering, participants were given two options for engagement. Firstly, through the Google Form, participants received a link and were asked to confirm their willingness to participate.

Secondly, participants could opt for virtual interviews via Google Meet or Zoom, with scheduling agreed upon mutually. Participants were informed of the interview duration and given the flexibility to request adjustments, emphasizing participant comfort and engagement throughout the process. Notably, all participants favored the Google Form over face-to-face interviews, showcasing its convenience and efficiency.

The findings of this study illuminate the intricate landscape of classroom observation in the new normal, offering insights into the practices, experiences and perspectives of school administrators and teachers. The emergence of subthemes such as "Challenges and Adaptations in Classroom Observation" and "Flexibility and Innovation in New Normal Classroom Observation" among administrators underscores the diverse array of challenges encountered in ensuring effective observation practices amidst the transition to digital education.

The teachers' perspectives shed light on their preferences for observation methods aligned with the evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education. The subthemes of "Preferences in New Normal Classroom Observation Methods" and "Flexibility and Skill Discovery" underscore educators' acknowledgment of the importance of adapting to the evolving educational landscape and embracing innovative approaches. Consequently, the major theme of "Evolving Pedagogical Paradigms in Digital Education" emerges, symbolizing a transformative shift in teaching practices driven by technological advancements and the necessity for educators to remain flexible and innovative in their instructional approaches.

In this study, several challenges, adaptations, and opportunities were identified in relation to digital classroom observation and evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education. Given the current situation of extreme hot weather conditions, many schools have transitioned to online classes, making the findings particularly relevant and applicable.

These findings underscore the significance of embracing flexibility and innovation in digital education, particularly within the context of new normal classroom observation. By utilizing various observation methods and technological tools, educators can enhance teaching effectiveness, foster student engagement, and promote equitable access to quality education in the new normal classroom setting, even in challenging weather conditions.

The challenges faced by educators, administrators, and observers in the new normal classroom observation landscape are multifaceted, with poor internet connectivity emerging as a significant hindrance. Despite the advantages of online teaching in facilitating teacher-student interactions and learning processes, the reality of connectivity issues poses substantial limitations.

In response to these challenges, recommendations have been proposed to enhance instructional leadership in the digital education landscape. Enhanced professional development initiatives can address technical issues, improve observation modalities, and foster innovative approaches to classroom observation. Strategic technology integration, including investments in robust infrastructure and reliable internet connectivity, is crucial for facilitating seamless observation experiences.

Continued research and evaluation are paramount to further explore the implications of connectivity challenges and evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education. Future studies can delve deeper into these themes, examine their impact across diverse educational contexts, and contribute to evidence-based practices in digital education.

In addition, this study also highlights the importance of addressing the social and emotional aspects of classroom observation in the new normal. As educators and administrators navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by digital education, it is essential to consider the impact on teacher morale, motivation, and well-being. The transition to virtual classroom observation can be isolating and stressful, particularly for educators who may feel disconnected from their students and colleagues.

In terms of technology integration, this study emphasizes the importance of user-centered design in developing digital platforms and tools for classroom observation. By prioritizing user experience and accessibility, schools can help to ensure that educators and administrators have equitable access to the resources and support necessary for effective observation practices.

The study is significant and contributes to the field of education in several ways. Firstly, the study emphasizes the critical role of classroom observation in the new normal of remote and virtual learning, which has become increasingly relevant since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be relevant due to the ongoing suspension of classes caused by extreme weather conditions, such as heat waves, that lead to online class modalities.

The study's focus on the new normal classroom observation practices is timely and relevant, as educators and administrators continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by virtual learning environments. The study provides insights into the practices of school administrators and teachers in conducting classroom observations in virtual environments, which

is a critical aspect of ensuring effective teaching and learning in the absence of traditional face-to-face interactions.

The study offers practical recommendations for enhancing instructional leadership in the new normal of remote and virtual learning. The recommendations are based on the findings of the study and are designed to support school administrators and teachers in navigating the challenges and opportunities associated with conducting classroom observations in virtual environments.

The evolving definition of digital education in the context of classroom observation involves a shift towards a more technology-integrated and interactive learning environment. This definition encompasses the use of digital tools and resources to enhance teaching methodologies, improve student engagement, and facilitate real-time observation and assessment.

Establishing instructional leadership is crucial in the context of this study on classroom observation practices in the new normal. Instructional leadership involves creating a supportive and conducive environment for teaching and learning, where administrators and educators work collaboratively to enhance instructional practices and student outcomes.

Education Commission (EdCom 2) Recommendations with Identified Challenges

Challenge 1: Internet Connectivity Issues

The challenge of internet connectivity issues impacting virtual classroom observation practices directly intersects with EdCom 2's recommendation to prioritize digital infrastructure development and accessibility in education. By addressing these connectivity challenges, schools can ensure that all students have equal access to online learning opportunities, aligning with EdCom 2's goal of bridging the digital divide and promoting inclusive education for all learners.

Challenge 2: Adaptation to New Teaching Modalities

The need for teachers to adapt to new teaching modalities in the digital learning environment is a critical challenge that resonates with EdCom 2's call for continuous professional development and capacity building for educators. By providing targeted training and support for teachers to navigate and excel in digital teaching environments, schools can align with EdCom 2's vision of empowering educators to deliver high-quality instruction that meets the diverse needs of students in today's educational landscape.

Challenge 3: Flexibility and Innovation in Instructional Practices

The challenge of fostering flexibility and innovation in instructional practices, particularly in the context of the new normal classroom observation, directly aligns with EdCom 2's emphasis on promoting a culture of innovation and responsiveness in education. By encouraging educators to embrace innovative teaching approaches and adapt to changing educational paradigms, schools can embody EdCom 2's vision of a dynamic and forward-thinking education system that prepares students for success in a rapidly evolving world.

Classroom Management and Leadership Perspectives with EdCom 2 Recommendations

To further enrich the discussion and situate the findings within a broader scholarly context, it is important to consider the insights from the literature on classroom management and instructional leadership, and how these perspectives align with the recommendations of the Education Commission (EdCom 2).

Classroom Management Strategies in the New Normal

The challenges identified in this study, such as adapting to new teaching modalities and ensuring flexibility in instructional practices, have significant implications for effective classroom management in the new normal educational landscape. Scholars have emphasized the importance of developing adaptive classroom management strategies that can effectively address the unique dynamics of virtual and hybrid learning environments.

Distributed Instructional Leadership

The literature on instructional leadership has evolved to recognize the need for a more distributed model of leadership, where responsibilities are shared among various stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, and other educational professionals. This aligns with EdCom 2's recommendation to foster collaborative environments and empower educators at all levels to contribute to instructional improvement.

Cultivating a Culture of Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Scholars have emphasized the importance of cultivating a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in educational institutions. This perspective resonates with EdCom 2's call for a dynamic and responsive education system that can adapt to evolving needs and challenges. By encouraging a culture that values experimentation, risk-taking, and ongoing professional development, schools can better support educators in navigating the new normal, embracing flexible instructional practices, and continuously enhancing their pedagogical expertise.

Emerging Principles in Instructional Leadership Grounded in Study Findings*Distributed Instructional Leadership*

The study's findings highlighted the diverse perspectives and experiences of both administrators and teachers in navigating the challenges and adaptations related to the new normal classroom observation. This aligns with the emerging principle of distributed instructional leadership, where the responsibility is shared among various stakeholders. The finding that "teachers and administrators jointly developed virtual observation protocols that accommodated the needs of both groups" demonstrates how collaborative decision-making and shared leadership responsibilities positively impact classroom observation practices in the new normal.

Emphasis on Continuous Learning and Capacity Building

The study revealed the need for teachers to adapt to new teaching modalities in the digital learning environment, a key challenge in the new normal. This finding supports the emerging principle that instructional leaders must continuously learn and build their own capacity to effectively support teachers. As discussed in Brolund (2020), ongoing professional development and capacity building initiatives are essential for instructional leaders to empower teachers to excel in the evolving educational landscape.

Prioritizing Instructional Resources

One of the key challenges identified in the study was the prevalence of internet connectivity issues impacting virtual classroom observation practices. This finding supports the emerging principle that instructional leaders must prioritize instructional time and resources to address technological barriers. As discussed in NAESP (2019), allocating resources effectively and

addressing connectivity challenges are crucial for ensuring the success of virtual classroom observation practices.

Unique Contributions and Implications of the Study

Capturing Diverse Stakeholder Perspectives

A key strength of this study is its ability to capture and synthesize the perspectives of both administrators and teachers on the challenges, adaptations, and opportunities related to the new normal classroom observation. By incorporating the voices of these diverse stakeholders, the study provides a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the evolving classroom observation landscape.

Highlighting the Flexibility and Adaptability of Virtual Observation

The study's findings underscore the potential benefits of virtual and hybrid classroom observation methods, particularly in terms of their flexibility and adaptability. While previous research has often emphasized the limitations of online observation, this study reveals how these modalities can actually enhance accessibility, convenience, and the ability to accommodate diverse teaching and learning contexts.

Informing Instructional Leadership Strategies

By integrating the literature on instructional leadership, this study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the implications of the new normal classroom observation for school leaders. The insights generated can inform the development of more effective instructional leadership strategies, including the need to broaden the conceptualization of leadership, leverage digital competencies, and create supportive organizational conditions.

Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice

The study's findings on the challenges and adaptations related to new normal classroom observation practices offer valuable insights for policymakers and educational authorities. By highlighting the real-world experiences and perspectives of educators, the study can help bridge the gap between policy directives and the practical realities faced by schools.

Research Utilization: Enhancing Instructional Leadership beyond the Study

To ensure the effective utilization of this study, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive dissemination and implementation strategy. This can involve actively engaging with key stakeholders, such as policymakers, school district leaders, and professional development providers, to share the study's findings and advocate for the adoption of the recommended practices.

Ultimately, the true impact of this research will be measured by its ability to catalyze tangible improvements in the quality of education, the effectiveness of instructional leadership, and the professional growth and empowerment of educators. By proactively disseminating the findings, fostering collaborative partnerships, and advocating for the implementation of your recommendations, the researcher can position the study as a valuable resource for enhancing instructional leadership and transforming the educational landscape, both in the Arayat West District of Pampanga and beyond.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted nature of classroom observation in the new normal, as perceived by both school administrators and teachers. The emergence of subthemes such as "Challenges and Adaptations in Classroom Observation" and "Flexibility and Innovation in New Normal Classroom Observation" among administrators underscores the diverse array of challenges faced in ensuring effective observation practices amidst the transition to digital education.

Concurrently, teachers' perspectives reveal their preferences for observation methods aligned with the evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education. The subthemes of "Preferences in New Normal Classroom Observation Methods" and "Flexibility and Skill Discovery" underscore educators' recognition of the importance of adapting to the changing educational landscape and embracing innovative approaches.

Overall, these findings highlight the dynamic nature of classroom observation in the new normal and the pressing need for educators and administrators to navigate the challenges posed by connectivity issues while embracing the opportunities presented by evolving pedagogical paradigms. By addressing these challenges and leveraging innovative approaches, stakeholders in education can effectively enhance teaching effectiveness, promote student engagement, and ensure equitable access to quality education in the digital era.

Recommendations

Enhanced Professional Development: Recognizing the challenges and adaptations faced by school administrators and teachers in the new normal classroom observation, there is an opportunity to provide targeted professional development initiatives. Training sessions and workshops can focus on addressing technical issues, improving the effectiveness of observation modalities, and fostering innovative approaches to classroom observation.

Strategic Technology Integration: Given the emphasis on flexibility and innovation in the new normal classroom observation, educational institutions should prioritize strategic technology integration. Investing in robust infrastructure, reliable internet connectivity, and user-friendly digital platforms can facilitate seamless classroom observation experiences for both administrators and teachers.

Promotion of Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Embracing flexibility and skill discovery among teachers underscores the importance of promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing within educational communities. Establishing platforms for educators to exchange best practices, share resources, and collaborate on innovative teaching strategies can foster a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth.

Curriculum and Instructional Design Adaptation: Understanding teachers' preferences in new normal classroom observation methods highlights the need for curriculum and instructional design adaptation. Educational stakeholders should consider integrating observation-friendly pedagogical approaches that prioritize engagement, interaction, and alignment with digital learning environments.

Empowerment of Educators: Empowering educators to navigate evolving pedagogical paradigms in digital education requires a multifaceted approach. Providing opportunities for professional development, fostering a supportive learning environment, and recognizing and

celebrating teachers' efforts in embracing flexibility and innovation can contribute to their professional growth and satisfaction.

Continued Research and Evaluation: The emergence of major themes such as "Navigating Connectivity Challenges in Virtual Classroom Observation" and "Evolving Pedagogical Paradigms in Digital Education" underscores the importance of continued research and evaluation in the field of educational technology and pedagogy. Future studies can delve deeper into these themes, explore their implications across diverse educational contexts, and contribute to evidence-based practices in digital education.

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