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TEACHER MOTIVATION, SELF-EFFICACY, AND CLASSROOM CHALLENGES IN EARLY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF GRADE 1 TEACHERS IN A RURAL PHILIPPINE SCHOOL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom challenges among Grade 1 teachers at San Isidro West Elementary School, San Isidro West, Santa Maria, Isabela. The study aimed to examine the experiences of Grade 1 teachers in managing early elementary classrooms within a rural Philippine school context, focusing on their sources of motivation, perceptions of teaching competence, and challenges encountered in classroom instruction. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving Grade 1 teachers and selected school stakeholders. Thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) intrinsic motivation and commitment to learner development, (2) teacher self-efficacy in classroom instruction and learner management, (3) adaptive and learner-centered teaching practices, and (4) classroom and instructional challenges in rural early elementary education. Findings showed that teachers remained highly motivated due to their passion for teaching, commitment to learners, and sense of professional responsibility despite resource limitations and classroom difficulties. Teachers demonstrated confidence in managing classroom instruction, learner behavior, and differentiated learning activities, although they encountered challenges related to large class sizes, limited instructional materials, learner diversity, and parental support. The study concludes that teacher motivation and self-efficacy significantly influence instructional effectiveness and classroom engagement in early elementary education. Strengthening institutional support, professional development opportunities, and resource allocation is recommended to improve teaching experiences and instructional outcomes in rural schools.

Keywords: teacher motivation, teacher self-efficacy, classroom challenges, Grade 1 education, rural education, elementary education, qualitative study, Philippines

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I. INTRODUCTION

Early elementary education plays a critical role in shaping learners' foundational literacy, numeracy, social, emotional, and behavioral development. Among elementary grade levels, Grade 1 is considered one of the most challenging yet significant stages because learners transition from informal and play-based learning environments into more structured classroom instruction.

Grade 1 teachers therefore carry substantial responsibilities in facilitating meaningful learning experiences, classroom adjustment, learner engagement, and socio-emotional development among young learners.

Teacher motivation and self-efficacy are essential factors influencing instructional effectiveness and learner outcomes in early elementary education. Motivated teachers demonstrate commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence in classroom instruction despite professional and contextual challenges. Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to effectively manage classrooms, facilitate instruction, and influence learner achievement. High levels of self-efficacy enable teachers to adapt instructional practices, manage learner behavior, and maintain positive classroom environments.

In rural Philippine schools, Grade 1 teachers often encounter numerous instructional and classroom-related challenges, including inadequate instructional materials, limited technological resources, learner diversity, insufficient parental support, and large class sizes.

Teachers in geographically challenged educational settings frequently perform multiple roles while addressing the academic, emotional, and developmental needs of young learners.

Despite these difficulties, many teachers remain committed to delivering quality education through adaptive and learner-centered instructional approaches. Teachers continuously modify teaching strategies, contextualize lessons, and provide emotional support to ensure

meaningful learning experiences among Grade 1 learners. Previous studies highlighted the importance of teacher motivation and self-efficacy in improving instructional quality, classroom management, and learner engagement. However, limited qualitative studies have explored the lived experiences of Grade 1 teachers in rural Philippine school settings, particularly regarding how motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom challenges shape instructional practices in early elementary education.

Objectives of the Study

This study therefore aimed to explore teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom challenges among Grade 1 teachers at San Isidro West Elementary School, San Isidro West, Santa Maria, Isabela.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What motivates Grade 1 teachers in performing their instructional responsibilities?
2. How do Grade 1 teachers perceive their self-efficacy in classroom instruction and learner management?
3. What classroom challenges do teachers encounter in early elementary education within a rural school setting?
4. What implications may be derived for improving teacher support and instructional practices in rural elementary schools?

Review of Related Literature

Teacher Motivation in Elementary Education

Teacher motivation refers to the internal and external factors that influence teachers' commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence in performing instructional responsibilities. According to Abraham Maslow, motivation is influenced by individuals' needs, fulfillment, and sense of purpose (Maslow, 1943). In educational contexts, motivated teachers demonstrate stronger dedication to learner development and instructional effectiveness.



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Studies revealed that intrinsic motivation, professional differentiation, and responsiveness to learners' needs and fulfillment, positive teacher-learner relationships, and developmental levels. Lev Vygotsky emphasized the commitment to learners significantly influence teacher importance of guided interaction and scaffolding in performance and job satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2020). supporting young learners' cognitive development Teachers who perceive their work as meaningful are more (Vygotsky, 1978).

resilient and adaptable despite classroom challenges and resource limitations. Grade 1 teachers frequently utilize differentiated instruction, contextualized activities, play-based learning, storytelling, and collaborative classroom strategies to maintain learner participation and comprehension. Such adaptive practices contribute to meaningful learning experiences and positive classroom interaction.

Teacher Self-Efficacy in Classroom Instruction

Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their ability to effectively facilitate instruction, manage classroom behavior, and influence learner achievement (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrate confidence in implementing instructional strategies, addressing learner needs, and adapting to classroom challenges.

Research indicates that teacher self-efficacy positively influences classroom management, instructional quality, learner engagement, and academic outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In early elementary education, self-efficacy becomes essential because teachers frequently address diverse learner needs, classroom behaviors, and developmental differences.

Classroom Challenges in Rural Elementary Education

Rural elementary schools frequently encounter challenges related to inadequate instructional resources, large class sizes, learner diversity, insufficient parental involvement, and limited technological support (OECD, 2019). Grade 1 teachers often face additional challenges in addressing learners' short attention spans, behavioral adjustment, literacy difficulties, and emotional needs.

Studies revealed that teachers in rural schools frequently adapt instructional approaches and improvise learning materials to sustain learner engagement despite resource limitations (Dela Peña, 2020). However, continuous workload demands and classroom pressures may affect teacher motivation, emotional well-being, and instructional effectiveness.

Learner-Centered and Adaptive Teaching Practices

Learner-centered teaching emphasizes flexibility,

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to explore teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and classroom challenges among Grade 1 teachers in a rural Philippine school context. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to examine participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and instructional realities within natural educational settings.

Research Locale

The study was conducted at San Isidro West Elementary School located in San Isidro West, Santa Maria, Isabela, Philippines. The school serves learners from rural farming communities and reflects the instructional realities and classroom experiences commonly encountered in geographically challenged elementary schools.

Participants of the Study

The participants included six Grade 1 teachers and selected school stakeholders who possessed direct experiences related to early elementary classroom instruction and learner management. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their teaching experiences and involvement in Grade 1 education.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were gathered through multiple qualitative data collection methods to ensure comprehensive exploration



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and triangulation of findings. Specifically, the researcher Prior to data gathering, permission was secured from the utilized semi-structured interviews, classroom school administration and informed consent was obtained observations, and document analysis throughout the from all participants. The researcher ensured that all data conduct of the study. These methods enabled the researcher collection procedures were conducted systematically, to gather rich descriptions and detailed insights regarding ethically, and with minimal disruption to regular classroom teacher motivation, self-efficacy, instructional practices, instruction.

and classroom challenges experienced by Grade 1 teachers in a rural Philippine school context.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the teacher participants to explore their motivational framework developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria experiences, perceptions of teaching competence, Clarke (2006). Coding, categorization, and theme classroom management strategies, instructional practices, generation were conducted systematically to identify and challenges encountered in Grade 1 teaching. The meaningful patterns and interpretations from the collected interview format allowed flexibility for participants to data.

openly share their experiences, feelings, and perspectives

regarding classroom realities and instructional **Trustworthiness of the Study**

responsibilities. Follow-up questions were also utilized to Credibility was established through triangulation and clarify responses and obtain deeper insights into member checking. Dependability was ensured through audit participants' lived experiences and coping mechanisms trails and systematic documentation of research procedures. within the teaching-learning process.

Classroom observations were conducted during actual through detailed descriptions of the research process, classroom instruction to examine teacher-learner participants, and findings.

interaction, learner engagement, classroom routines, and

classroom management practices. Observation notes **Ethical Considerations**

focused on how teachers facilitated lessons, maintained Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, learner participation, addressed behavioral concerns, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for utilized instructional materials, and implemented learner- participants were strictly observed throughout the conduct centered teaching strategies. The researcher also observed of the study. Permission from school authorities and learners' attentiveness, participation, interaction, and informed consent from participants were secured prior to responses during classroom activities to better understand data gathering activities.

the instructional environment and engagement processes within Grade 1 classrooms.

Document analysis was likewise employed to examine

lesson plans, instructional materials, classroom records, activity sheets, visual aids, and other relevant teaching

documents utilized during classroom instruction. These

documents provided supporting evidence regarding West Elementary School were strongly motivated by their teachers' instructional preparation, classroom strategies, passion for teaching, commitment to learner development, differentiated learning activities, and learner assessment and sense of professional responsibility. Despite classroom practices. Document analysis also enabled the researcher to difficulties and limited educational resources, teachers validate and support the findings gathered from interviews remained dedicated to supporting learners' academic, and classroom observations. emotional, and social growth.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Intrinsic Motivation and Commitment to Learner Development

The findings revealed that Grade 1 teachers at San Isidro



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One participant shared:

“Kahit mahirap minsan ang pagtuturo sa Grade 1, fulfilling kapag nakikita mong natututo ang mga bata.”

Another teacher explained:

“Ang motivation ko talaga ay iyong makita silang marunong nang magbasa at magsulat.”

Teachers described teaching as both a professional responsibility and a personal mission to help young learners succeed. Participants emphasized that learners’ progress, classroom participation, and positive behavior served as strong sources of motivation in performing instructional responsibilities.

One participant stated:

“Masaya kapag nakikita mong unti-unti silang nagiging confident sa sarili nila.”

Another teacher added:

“Nakakagaan ng pakiramdam kapag may improvement kahit paunti-unti.”

Classroom observations revealed that teachers consistently demonstrated patience, encouragement, and emotional support during classroom interaction. Teachers motivated learners through positive reinforcement, praise, individualized attention, and supportive communication. Learners also expressed appreciation for their teachers’ encouragement and classroom guidance.

One learner shared:

“Mabait po si teacher at tinutulungan niya kami kapag nahihirapan kami.”

Another learner stated:

“Mas gusto ko pong pumasok kasi masaya po si teacher magturo.”

The findings suggest that intrinsic motivation and emotional commitment significantly influence teachers’ persistence, instructional dedication, and classroom engagement in early elementary education. Teachers’ passion for learner development contributed to positive classroom environments and meaningful learner experiences.

These findings support the Self-Determination Theory of learner engagement.

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, which emphasizes intrinsic motivation, fulfillment, and meaningful

engagement in professional practice (Ryan & Deci, 2020). One learner shared:

Similarly, studies revealed that emotionally committed teachers demonstrate stronger resilience and instructional effectiveness despite workplace challenges (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Theme 2: Teacher Self-Efficacy in Classroom Instruction and Learner Management

The findings further revealed that Grade 1 teachers demonstrated confidence in their ability to facilitate classroom instruction, manage learner behavior, and address learners’ academic needs despite instructional difficulties.

Teachers expressed strong beliefs in their teaching capabilities, particularly in handling early literacy instruction, classroom participation, and learner behavior management.

One participant stated:

“Kailangan talagang maging patient at creative sa Grade 1 kasi iba-iba ang learning needs nila.”

Another teacher shared:

“Naniniwala akong kaya kong turuan ang mga bata kahit mahirap minsan ang sitwasyon.”

Teachers explained that classroom experience, preparation, and continuous adaptation strengthened their confidence in handling instructional responsibilities. Participants described using differentiated instruction, storytelling, games, visual aids, and interactive classroom activities to sustain learner participation and comprehension.

One participant noted:

“Kapag hindi nila maintindihan agad, naghahanap ako ng ibang paraan para mas maintindihan nila.”

Another teacher added:

“Importante talaga ang creativity at flexibility sa pagtuturo sa mga batang Grade 1.”

Classroom observations showed that teachers confidently facilitated discussions, redirected learner behavior, managed classroom routines, and encouraged active participation. Teachers utilized positive reinforcement and supportive interaction to maintain classroom discipline and

Learners likewise expressed trust and confidence in their teachers.



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“Tinutulungan po kami ni teacher kapag nahihirapan po lessons. Teachers modified instructional approaches kami sa reading.” according to learners’ comprehension levels, interests, and

Another learner stated:

“Hindi po kami natatakot magtanong kasi mabait po si One teacher noted:
teacher.”

The findings indicate that teacher self-efficacy nagpapalit ako agad ng activity.”

significantly contributes to instructional effectiveness, Another participant shared:

classroom management, and learner engagement in early “Importante ang patience at adjustment lalo na sa mga elementary education. Teachers’ confidence enabled them batang mabagal matuto.”

to remain adaptive, patient, and responsive despite Learners also expressed positive experiences regarding classroom challenges. interactive classroom activities.

These findings support the Social Cognitive Theory of One learner shared:

Albert Bandura, which emphasizes the influence of self- “Masaya po kapag may games at kanta sa klase.”

efficacy beliefs on performance, persistence, and Another learner explained:

behavioral outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Similarly, “Mas naiintindihan po namin kapag may pictures at Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) emphasized that activities.”

teachers with high self-efficacy demonstrate stronger The findings suggest that learner-centered and adaptive classroom management, instructional flexibility, and instructional practices contribute significantly to learner learner support practices. engagement, participation, and classroom interaction in

Theme 3: Adaptive and Learner-Centered Teaching Practices

Another major finding revealed that Grade 1 teachers These findings align with the sociocultural learning theory frequently utilized adaptive and learner-centered of Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes scaffolding, guided instructional practices to address diverse learner needs and interaction, and responsive instructional support in maintain classroom engagement. Teachers emphasized the promoting cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). The importance of flexibility, scaffolding, and differentiated results also support learner-centered pedagogical instruction in early elementary classrooms. frameworks emphasizing differentiated and

One participant explained:

“Hindi puwedeng iisa lang ang paraan ng pagtuturo kasi education.

iba-iba ang level ng mga bata.”

Another teacher stated:

“Mas natututo sila kapag may games, songs, at activities na related sa lesson.”

Teachers frequently incorporated storytelling, visual aids, participants encountered several classroom and songs, play-based activities, collaborative tasks, and instructional challenges affecting the delivery of quality contextualized examples into classroom instruction. Grade 1 education within the rural school setting.

Participants emphasized that interactive and experiential One participant stated:

learning activities helped sustain learners’ attention, “Mahirap minsan kasi kulang ang materials at marami ang participation, and comprehension. bata sa classroom.”

Classroom observations revealed that learners became Another teacher explained:

more participative and enthusiastic during activity-based “May mga batang hirap pa talagang mag-focus at kailangan

Theme 4: Classroom and Instructional Challenges in Rural Early Elementary Education

Despite teachers’ motivation and instructional adaptability, participants encountered several classroom and instructional challenges affecting the delivery of quality Grade 1 education within the rural school setting.

One participant stated:

“Mahirap minsan kasi kulang ang materials at marami ang bata sa classroom.”

Another teacher explained:

“May mga batang hirap pa talagang mag-focus at kailangan



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ng mas tutok na guidance.”

Teachers identified large class sizes, limited instructional materials, insufficient technological resources, learner diversity, short attention spans, behavioral concerns, and lack of parental support as major classroom challenges.

Participants explained that these conditions affected instructional pacing, classroom management, and individualized learner support.

One participant shared:

“May mga batang walang support sa bahay kaya nahihirapan silang sumabay sa klase.”

Another teacher noted:

“Kulang minsan ang learning materials kaya kailangan pang gumawa ng sariling visual aids.”

Classroom observations showed that teachers frequently managed multiple learner needs simultaneously while maintaining classroom discipline and instructional flow. Teachers also exerted additional effort in preparing progress, participation, and academic improvement. Such improvised instructional materials and adjusting lessons according to learners’ varying comprehension levels.

Learners also recognized classroom limitations.

One learner shared:

“Minsan po maingay sa classroom kaya nahihirapan kaming makinig.”

Another learner stated:

“Mas gusto po namin kapag may maraming pictures at gamit sa lesson.”

Despite these difficulties, teachers demonstrated resilience, patience, and commitment in sustaining meaningful learning experiences. Participants emphasized that passion for teaching and concern for learners motivated them to continue adapting instructional strategies despite classroom limitations.

The findings indicate that rural classroom realities significantly affect instructional experiences in early elementary education. Strengthened institutional support, instructional resources, parental involvement, and teacher development programs are therefore essential in improving classroom instruction and learner outcomes.

These findings support the study of OECD (2019), which emphasized that rural schools frequently encounter infrastructural and instructional limitations affecting

educational quality and learner support. Similarly, Dela Peña (2020) highlighted that rural elementary teachers continuously adapt instructional practices despite classroom and resource-related challenges.

Discussion

The study revealed that teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and adaptive instructional practices significantly influence instructional effectiveness and learner engagement in Grade 1 education within rural Philippine school contexts. Teachers at San Isidro West Elementary School demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation and commitment to learner development despite instructional and classroom-related challenges.

Intrinsic motivation emerged as an important factor sustaining teachers’ persistence and instructional dedication. Teachers derived fulfillment from learners’ progress, participation, and academic improvement. Such findings reinforce motivational theories emphasizing the role of personal fulfillment and professional purpose in sustaining teacher engagement and resilience.

Teacher self-efficacy likewise contributed significantly to classroom instruction and learner management. Teachers who believed in their instructional capabilities demonstrated greater confidence, adaptability, and persistence in addressing classroom challenges. These findings support existing literature emphasizing the positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy, classroom management, and learner outcomes.

Adaptive and learner-centered teaching practices also strengthened classroom participation and learner engagement. Teachers frequently modified instructional strategies according to learners’ developmental levels, interests, and classroom behaviors. Interactive and experiential activities such as storytelling, games, songs, and collaborative tasks contributed to meaningful classroom interaction and sustained learner attention.

However, classroom challenges related to inadequate instructional materials, large class sizes, learner diversity, and insufficient parental support continue to affect instructional effectiveness in rural schools. Despite these limitations, teachers demonstrated resilience, flexibility,



and creativity in maintaining meaningful learning experiences for Grade 1 learners. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening institutional support systems, resource allocation, and professional development programs to improve teacher experiences and instructional quality in early elementary education.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teacher motivation and self-efficacy significantly influence instructional effectiveness, classroom management, and learner engagement in Grade 1 education within rural Philippine school settings. Teachers at San Isidro West Elementary School demonstrated strong commitment, resilience, and passion for learner development despite classroom and instructional challenges.

Teachers' confidence in their instructional capabilities enabled them to implement adaptive and learner-centered teaching practices that supported learner participation, comprehension, and classroom interaction. Interactive and differentiated instructional approaches strengthened learners' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during classroom activities.

However, challenges related to inadequate instructional resources, large class sizes, learner diversity, insufficient parental support, and limited facilities continue to affect the delivery of quality early elementary education in rural schools. Despite these constraints, teachers remained dedicated to sustaining meaningful learning experiences through creativity, flexibility, and instructional adaptation.

The study emphasizes the importance of teacher support, instructional resources, and professional development opportunities in strengthening early elementary education and improving learner outcomes in rural educational contexts.

Implications of the Study

The findings imply that schools and educational leaders should strengthen teacher support systems, particularly in rural elementary schools where teachers frequently encounter classroom and instructional challenges.

Institutional interventions focusing on teacher motivation, emotional well-being, and professional development may contribute positively to instructional effectiveness and classroom engagement.

Schools may provide additional instructional materials, classroom resources, and technological support to improve teaching conditions and learner participation in early elementary education. Strengthening parental involvement and community collaboration may also help address learner-related challenges and support classroom learning.

Professional development programs focusing on classroom management, differentiated instruction, learner-centered pedagogy, and socio-emotional support strategies may further enhance teachers' self-efficacy and instructional adaptability.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies using mixed-methods or comparative research designs to further explore teacher motivation, self-efficacy, and learner engagement across different rural and urban educational contexts.

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