



INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND PEDAGOGICAL CHALLENGES IN THE USE OF ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF SUBJECT INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE CITY OF ILAGAN, ISABELA

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the instructional effectiveness and pedagogical challenges experienced by elementary teachers in using English as a medium of subject instruction in public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan, Isabela. The study examined teachers' classroom experiences, language-related instructional difficulties, learner responses, and adaptive pedagogical strategies in English-mediated instruction. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with twelve purposively selected elementary teachers. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was utilized in analyzing the data. Findings revealed that teachers encountered challenges related to learners' limited English proficiency, comprehension difficulties, classroom participation, and vocabulary limitations. Participants also described difficulties in sustaining learner engagement and simplifying complex concepts using English instruction. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated pedagogical adaptability through code-switching, contextualized instruction, collaborative learning activities, visual aids, and technology-assisted strategies. Teachers further emphasized the importance of learner-centered approaches, patience, and instructional flexibility in promoting comprehension and participation. The findings underscore the importance of contextualized and responsive pedagogical practices in improving the effectiveness of English-mediated instruction in elementary education. The study highlights the need for strengthened language support programs, instructional resources, and professional development initiatives that enhance teachers' instructional competence in English-medium classrooms.

Keywords: English-medium instruction, pedagogical challenges, instructional effectiveness, elementary education, qualitative research, learner-centered pedagogy

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I. INTRODUCTION

English remains a significant medium of instruction in Philippine basic education, particularly in content-based subjects where language proficiency directly influences learner comprehension, participation, and academic performance. In elementary education, teachers are expected to utilize English effectively in delivering lessons while simultaneously addressing learners' language development and comprehension needs. However, multilingual classroom realities, varying learner proficiency levels, and limited language exposure often create instructional challenges in English-mediated classrooms.

Teachers frequently encounter difficulties related to learners' vocabulary limitations, low reading comprehension, limited oral communication skills, and reduced classroom participation. These challenges become more evident among elementary learners who are still developing foundational language competencies. Consequently, teachers employ adaptive pedagogical strategies such as code-switching, contextualized instruction, visual scaffolding, and collaborative learning to improve comprehension and sustain learner engagement.

Despite the importance of English-medium instruction, limited qualitative studies have explored teachers' lived instructional experiences and pedagogical challenges within localized elementary school contexts in the Philippines. Understanding these realities is essential in strengthening instructional support systems and responsive language teaching practices.

This study explored the instructional effectiveness and pedagogical challenges experienced by teachers in using English as a medium of subject instruction in public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan, Isabela. Specifically, it examined teachers' instructional experiences, learner-related challenges, and adaptive pedagogical practices in English-mediated classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction, scaffolding, and contextualized learning in language development and comprehension. The study also utilized Cummins' Theory of Language Proficiency (2000), which highlights the relationship

between language competence and academic learning in multilingual educational settings.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore teachers' lived experiences, instructional effectiveness, and pedagogical challenges in using English as a medium of subject instruction. The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan, Isabela. Participants consisted of twelve elementary teachers selected through purposive sampling based on their experience in English-mediated instruction.

Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews focusing on instructional challenges, learner responses, classroom experiences, and teaching strategies. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

The gathered data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Coding and thematic categorization were conducted to identify recurring patterns and meanings related to instructional effectiveness and pedagogical practices. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, triangulation, audit trails, and thick description.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1: Addressing Learners' Limited English Proficiency and Comprehension Difficulties

Participants identified learners' limited English vocabulary, poor reading comprehension, low confidence in oral communication, and difficulty understanding subject concepts delivered in English as major instructional concerns in English-mediated classrooms. Teachers explained that many elementary learners struggled to process lessons delivered purely in English, particularly in content-heavy subjects that required critical understanding and interpretation. Participants further emphasized that learners often became hesitant to participate during recitations and classroom discussions due to fear of making grammatical mistakes or being unable to express themselves



fluently in English.

One participant shared:

“Nahihirapan ang ilang learners na intindihin ang lesson kapag purely English ang discussion.”

Another teacher stated:

“Kulang minsan ang vocabulary nila kaya nahihiya silang sumagot.”

A participant further explained:

“May mga learners na naiintindihan ang concept pero hindi nila kayang i-express sa English kaya nagiging tahimik sila sa klase.”

Teachers also observed that comprehension difficulties became more evident during reading activities, written assessments, and independent learning tasks. Learners with weak reading comprehension often required repeated explanations, simplified instructions, and additional scaffolding before they could fully understand lesson concepts.

One participant remarked:

“Kapag mahina ang reading comprehension ng learners, mas matagal bago nila maintindihan ang lesson.”

Another participant added:

“Kailangan minsan ulit-ulitin ang discussion para masundan nila ang lesson.”

Participants explained that language proficiency gaps significantly affected classroom participation, learner confidence, and academic engagement. These findings align with Cummins' (2000) Theory of Language Proficiency, which emphasizes that limited language competence may hinder learners' academic understanding and classroom interaction. Similarly, Bernardo (2020) noted that multilingual learners often experience comprehension difficulties in English-mediated instruction due to limited vocabulary exposure and language processing challenges. The findings further support studies by Garcia and Santos (2021), which revealed that language barriers remain among the primary instructional concerns in multilingual Philippine classrooms.

Theme 2: Utilizing Code-Switching and Contextualized Instruction to Improve Understanding

Teachers emphasized the importance of code-switching and contextualized instruction in improving learner comprehension and participation in English-mediated classrooms. Participants explained that combining English explanations with Filipino or local language translations enabled learners to better understand difficult concepts, instructions, and unfamiliar vocabulary. Teachers viewed code-switching not as a limitation but as an adaptive instructional strategy that bridged language gaps and promoted meaningful learning.

One participant explained:

“Kapag pinapaliwanag sa mas simpleng paraan o minsan may Filipino translation, mas naiintindihan nila.”

Another participant stated:

“Hindi maiiwasan ang code-switching lalo na kapag nahihirapan ang learners sa English terms.”

Teachers also described contextualizing lessons using familiar community experiences, local examples, and real-life situations to make abstract concepts easier to understand. Participants observed that learners became more engaged and responsive when lessons were connected to situations they could personally relate to.

One teacher shared:

“Kapag inuunay mo sa experiences nila o sa nangyayari sa community, mas mabilis nilang naiintindihan ang lesson.”

Another participant remarked:

“Mas nagiging interactive ang klase kapag relatable ang examples na ginagamit.”

Participants highlighted that contextualized instruction reduced learners' anxiety and encouraged them to participate more confidently during discussions and activities. Teachers believed that flexible language use promoted inclusivity and strengthened classroom communication. The findings indicate that code-switching and contextualized pedagogical practices significantly enhance learner comprehension and engagement in multilingual classrooms. These findings support Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and contextualized experiences in promoting learning. Similarly, Martin (2019) explained that code-



switching serves as an effective scaffolding strategy in reduced learners' communication anxiety.

bilingual and multilingual educational settings. Studies by Reyes and Cruz (2022) further revealed that contextualized language instruction improves learner participation, comprehension, and classroom confidence among elementary learners.

Theme 3: Promoting Learner Engagement Through Interactive and Visual Strategies

Participants described utilizing interactive and learner-centered instructional strategies such as collaborative learning, games, visual aids, multimedia presentations, storytelling, and group activities to sustain learner engagement and reduce learners' fear of using English.

Teachers explained that purely lecture-based instruction often resulted in passive classroom participation, whereas activity-based approaches encouraged learners to communicate, collaborate, and participate more actively.

A participant stated:

"Mas nagiging confident sila kapag may activities at visuals kaysa puro lecture lang."

Another teacher shared:

"Kapag may games o group activities, mas nawawala ang hiya nila sa paggamit ng English."

Teachers observed that visual materials, pictures, videos, and interactive multimedia presentations helped simplify lesson concepts and sustain learners' attention during classroom discussions. Multimedia-assisted instruction also increased learners' motivation and classroom participation.

One participant explained:

"Mas interesado ang learners kapag may videos at visuals kasi mas madaling maintindihan ang lesson."

Another participant added:

"Kapag collaborative activities, natututo silang magsalita at makipag-communicate gamit ang English."

Participants further emphasized that interactive activities created a supportive learning environment where learners became more willing to practice speaking and expressing ideas in English without fear of judgment. Teachers noted that collaborative learning promoted peer support and

The findings highlight the effectiveness of learner-centered and interactive pedagogical approaches in English-mediated instruction. These findings support constructivist learning principles emphasizing active participation and collaborative learning in language development. Research by Gay (2018) emphasized that interactive and culturally responsive pedagogies strengthen learner motivation and participation. Similarly, studies by De Guzman and Torres (2021) found that multimedia integration and collaborative classroom strategies significantly improve language engagement and classroom confidence among elementary learners.

Theme 4: Demonstrating Instructional Flexibility and Pedagogical Adaptability

Teachers emphasized that instructional flexibility, patience, and continuous pedagogical adaptation were essential in addressing diverse learner needs within English-mediated classrooms. Participants explained that learners differed significantly in language proficiency, learning pace, confidence, and comprehension abilities, requiring teachers to continuously modify instructional approaches according to classroom realities.

One teacher remarked:

"Kailangan talagang marunong kang mag-adjust depende sa level ng learners."

Another participant shared:

"Hindi pwedeng pare-pareho ang strategy kasi iba-iba ang capacity ng learners."

Teachers described simplifying lesson explanations, adjusting instructional pacing, repeating discussions, and modifying classroom activities to ensure learner understanding. Participants also emphasized the importance of patience and emotional support in encouraging learners who struggled with English communication.

One participant explained:

"May mga learners na kailangan talagang dahan-dahan ang explanation para makasabay sila."

Another teacher stated:

"Bilang teacher, kailangan maging patient at observant para



malaman mo kung ano ang effective sa learners.”

Participants further highlighted reflective teaching practices such as evaluating lesson effectiveness, observing learner responses, and continuously improving classroom strategies. Teachers viewed adaptability as a critical component of effective English-mediated instruction in multilingual educational settings.

The findings suggest that instructional flexibility and pedagogical adaptability significantly strengthen teaching effectiveness and learner participation in English-medium classrooms. These findings align with Day and Gu’s (2020) assertion that effective teachers continuously negotiate classroom realities through reflective and adaptive instructional practices. Similarly, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) emphasized that inclusive and responsive pedagogies require teachers to adjust instructional approaches according to learners’ diverse needs and learning contexts. The findings further support studies by Santos and Ramirez (2022), which highlighted the importance of differentiated and adaptive teaching practices in multilingual elementary classrooms.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that teachers in public elementary schools in the City of Ilagan encounter significant pedagogical challenges in using English as a medium of subject instruction, particularly related to learners’ limited language proficiency, comprehension difficulties, and classroom participation. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated instructional effectiveness through code-switching, contextualized instruction, collaborative learning, multimedia integration, and learner-centered pedagogical practices.

The findings underscore the importance of adaptive and responsive instructional approaches in improving comprehension and engagement in English-mediated classrooms. Strengthening instructional resources, language support programs, and teacher professional development initiatives may further enhance the effectiveness of English-medium instruction in elementary education.

Implications of the Study

The findings may guide educational leaders and policymakers in strengthening language support initiatives, instructional resource provision, and teacher training programs related to English-medium instruction. Schools may further promote learner-centered and context-responsive pedagogical practices that address language diversity and varying learner proficiency levels. Future studies may explore the long-term effects of English-mediated instruction on learner achievement, language acquisition, and classroom engagement across diverse Philippine educational contexts.

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