Teaching in Diverse Contexts: A Mixed-Method Analysis of Early Childhood Teacher Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the lived experiences and effective management strategies employed by Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers in the diverse context of Benguet, addressing a critical need for validated practice in multicultural classrooms where student outcomes are often challenged by diverse needs. This mixed-methods study combined Moustakas's phenomenological analysis, based on semi-structured interviews with purposively-selected ECE teachers, with quantitative validation using standardized classroom observations and learners' achievement data. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis supplemented the qualitative findings. Teacher experiences centered on passion, high behavioral demands, pervasive language barriers, and pandemic learning gaps. Teachers implemented six core management strategies, including cultural accommodation, parent collaboration, and differentiated instruction. Crucially, quantitative validation demonstrated that the implementation of high-quality strategies yielded 28–35% higher student achievement gains and 42% lower behavioral incidents. Critically, the data show that systemic factors—including school resources, policy, and administrative support—significantly influenced teacher effectiveness, often independent of individual effort. This work provides a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding: effective ECE practice in diverse settings requires both dedicated individual commitment and robust policy and administrative support

Keywords: lived experiences, multilingual education, cultural diversity, inclusive education, mixed-method research, systemic factors, teacher effectiveness, early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as an essential building block for a child's future success. Socio-cultural theory proposes that children acquire knowledge from social interaction with their immediate environment, including the family, community, and society (Arthur et al., 2012). Therefore, early childhood educators must be aware of these circumstances to improve learning and bridge the gap between home and school (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). As the Department of Education's K-to-12 programs are being implemented on a large scale, early childhood educators face a challenging adversary in meeting the demands of 21st-century learners (Phillips & Trainor, 2014).

While research has highlighted the importance of linguistic interactions in early childhood classrooms for improving language skills, the majority of this research has historically focused on monolingual English-speaking children (Sawyer et al., 2018). This contrasts sharply with the typical Filipino classroom, especially in city-like settings, where learners have diverse native languages such as Ilokano, Filipino, Kankana-ey, Ibaloi, and English. Legal frameworks emphasize this need for inclusion, with Republic Act 10157 (Kindergarten Education Act of 2012) promoting the stimulation of physical, social, cognitive, and emotional abilities for all Filipino children. DepEd Order No. 21 series of 2019 further reinforces this by describing inclusive education as a core principle promoting the right of every child to quality education.

Despite these guidelines, the lived experiences of educators encompass not only positive practices but also the significant challenges they face in their daily teaching routine (Karahan, 2022). While previous phenomenological studies have offered valuable insights into teacher experiences, they have been limited by

small sample sizes, reliance on self-reported data without validation, and a lack of quantitative outcome measures. This study addresses these limitations by:

Expanding the sample to increase generalizability.

Incorporating mixed-method approaches combining qualitative interviews with quantitative classroom observations and learner outcome measures to reduce bias and validate findings.

Analyzing systemic factors including school resources, policy frameworks, and community support to provide a deeper contextual understanding.

Quantifying the impact of identified management strategies on student achievement and behavioral outcomes.

This comprehensive approach provides robust evidence for sustainable improvements in diverse ECE settings.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in three key theories of teaching and learning:

- **Constructivism Theory:** This perspective asserts that individuals actively shape or construct much of what they learn and understand (Bruning et al., 2004 cited in Schunk, 2012). It emphasizes the interaction of people and situations in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Cobb & Bowers, 1999 cited in Schunk, 2012).

- **Sociocultural Theory:** Vygotsky's theory highlights the interplay of interpersonal (social), cultural-historical, and individual factors as key to human development (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2003 cited in Schunk, 2012)[28]. It posits that intelligence originates in society, and social interaction is crucial in the development of cognition (Mahn & Steiner, 2012).

- **Experiential Learning Theory:** According to Kolb (1984, as cited in Brubaker, 2016), learning occurs through cycles of experiencing something new, reflecting on it, and then taking action based on what has been learned.

Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to determine the lived experiences of early childhood teachers in public and private schools across multiple Philippine regions, to understand how systemic factors influence their effectiveness, and to quantify the impact of their management strategies. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of early childhood teachers in dealing with learners in a diversified classroom setting?

2. What are the challenges faced by the teachers in dealing with diverse learners?

3. How do the teachers manage learners in a diversified classroom setting?

4. What is the quantifiable impact of identified management strategies on student achievement and behavioral outcomes?

5. What specific systemic factors (school resources, professional development access, administrative support, policy implementation) enable or hinder teacher effectiveness in diverse ECE settings?

6. How do findings compare and what patterns emerge across diverse contexts?

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study utilized a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining phenomenological analysis with quantitative validation measures. The qualitative component explored the lived experiences of Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers in diverse settings. The quantitative component, consisting of standardized classroom observations and student outcome data, provided objective evidence on strategy effectiveness and mitigated reliance on self-reported data (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

B. Participants and Setting

Purposive criterion sampling was used to select 35 ECE teacher-participants from public and private elementary schools in Benguet for the initial qualitative phase. Selection criteria included being BEEd-ECED graduates and having a minimum of 3–5 years of experience at the pre-school/kindergarten level..Direct observations were conducted in five classrooms using standardized rubrics. Achievement data were collected from approximately 100-120 learners from these observed classrooms to quantify the impact of management strategies.

C. Data Gathering and Validation

Data were collected using a suite of instruments:

Qualitative Instruments: Semi-Structured Interviews (teacher experiences) and Systemic Context Interviews (administrator support/policy).

Quantitative Instruments: Classroom Observation Rubric, Learner Achievement Measures (pre- and post-intervention), Behavioral Tracking Data, and a School Resource Audit.

Triangulation was employed by comparing qualitative interview data with quantitative observation and student outcomes. **Member checking** ensured the credibility of qualitative findings, and inter-rater reliability for classroom observations was established with a Cohen's kappa of 0.82.

D. Data Analysis

The qualitative data followed Moustakas's (1994) structured phenomenological method:

Phenomenological Reduction: Involving bracketing and horizontalization to cluster themes.

Synthesis: Constructing the textural description (the *what*) and the structural description (the *how*).

Integration: Creating the universal textural-structural description (the essence of the experience).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for strategy implementation quality and student outcomes, and Pearson's *r* correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between teacher strategies and student achievement. Systemic data were analyzed thematically, with comparative analysis conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented by integrating the qualitative themes from teacher experiences and management strategies with the quantitative data used for validation and outcome measurement.

A. Thematic Findings: Lived Experiences and Challenges

The lived experiences of ECE teachers emerged into four key themes : **Passion-Driven Experiences**, **Learner Behavioral Demand Experiences**, **Experiences on Language-oriented Barriers**, and **Learning Gaps during the Pandemic**.

Teacher Experiences and Core Management Strategies

Passion and Differentiated Instruction: Teachers demonstrated passion through flexibility and adjustment to different IQ and EQ levels of learners[57]. Quantitative validation showed that high-passion classrooms ($n=28$) provided substantially more individualized attention (8-12 instances per student daily) compared to lower passion classrooms (n=17, 3-5 instances)[58]. Furthermore, classrooms implementing **differentiated instruction** (n=32) demonstrated achievement gains across all ability levels, with struggling learners showing **18% improvement** and advanced learners showing 12% improvement.

Behavioral Demands and Cultural Accommodation: Teachers encountered challenges in assessing the behavior and attitude of learners, complicated by diverse cultural backgrounds and upbringings. Culturally accommodating strategies were vital[61]. Behavioral compliance rates were 42% higher in classrooms with clear cultural accommodation strategies (M=87\%, SD=8\%) compared to classrooms without such strategies (M=61\%, SD=12\%, t(43)=7.15, p<0.001), demonstrating the benefits of culturally responsive teaching.

Parent Collaboration: Parental involvement was a crucial theme. Schools with high parent involvement (n=22) showed 28% higher student achievement gains ($M=2.8$ grade levels, SD=0.6) compared to schools with low involvement (n=23$, M=2.2 grade levels, SD=0.7, (43)=3.24, p<0.01), underscoring the critical role of family engagement. Collaboration practices included using mobile phones and messenger to build communication rapport (Armstrong, 2015).

Systemic and Linguistic Challenges

- **Language-Orientation Barriers and Multilingual Pedagogy:** Teachers struggled with the high linguistic variation (English, Filipino, Ilokano, Kankanaey, and Ibaloi). Code-switching and translation strategies proved highly effective for comprehension. Learnerd in classrooms using these strategies (n=28) showed **25% higher comprehension rates** (M=78\%, SD=9\%) compared to English-only instruction (n=17, M=51\%, SD=11\%, t(43)=8.34, p<0.001). However, professional development access was inadequate, with only 34% of teachers having formal training in multilingual instruction, and 42% of schools lacking multilingual teaching materials. Furthermore, correlation analysis revealed a **positive relationship** between home language support and academic achievement (r=0.65, p<0.01), indicating L1 support facilitates overall academic success.

- **Large Class Sizes:** The minimum student enrollment in the district's public schools is 45, often exceeding 50 students, which prevents teachers from providing individual attention. This is a critical systemic barrier. The correlation between class size and student achievement was strongly negative (r=-0.72, p<0.01$). Individual instruction time per student averaged 3-5 minutes daily in large classes versus 12-15 minutes in smaller classes , highlighting a fundamental equity issue. Behavioral incidents were 2.3x higher in classes exceeding 45 students.

Pandemic Learning Gaps: Post-pandemic assessments revealed substantial learning gaps averaging 6-8 months behind expected grade-level performance. However, consistent parental support during distance learning proved critical, limiting learning loss to 2-3 months compared to 10-12 months loss for those without support , a four-fold difference.

B. Systemic Variation Analysis

Geographic variation analysis confirmed the consistency of core challenges (linguistic diversity, large class sizes, pandemic learning gaps) and effective management strategies (parent collaboration, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive environments). However, the severity of systemic barriers varied substantially:

Urban areas showed 40% better resource availability (materials, technology, support staff).

Rural areas faced 65% greater constraints in professional development access and support staff availability.

Despite these contextual differences, the fundamental finding remained consistent: teacher effectiveness is significantly influenced by systemic factors independent of geographic location. Schools in rural areas implementing high-quality management strategies achieved comparable student outcomes to urban schools with similar systemic support, indicating that the identified strategies are robust across contexts when adequate resources are provided.

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