



A closer look at neophyte teachers' instructional competence: A phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

The concept of instructional competence, which refers to the ability to show that one has the readiness and effectiveness of necessary skills within the teaching framework in public schools, has hardly ever been investigated. This qualitative descriptive phenomenological study aimed to discover the instructional competence of newly hired public school teachers. Through the lens of Albert Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory, it investigated what instructional competencies a newly hired teacher possessed that demonstrated readiness and efficacy of the required skills. The focus group discussions highlighted the crucial characteristics for improving the competencies. The results revealed six (6) emergent themes: *the acquisition of baseline instructional standards, coping with the shift of instructional quality, planning for quality instruction, an initiative for instructional improvement, dealing with uncertainties, and health and well-being stability*. The results highlighted that instructional competency might become self-efficient with increased experience and practice. Their prior teaching experience influenced the quality of a new teacher's instruction. In addition, teachers' competencies are gradually enhanced and strengthened as they gain experience in the field. As students discover new concepts, teachers begin to hone the skills that will allow them to manage classroom instruction effectively. This study deepens the understanding of instructional competence and may enable teachers and policymakers to design and implement initiatives. Since there is strong evidence that newly hired teachers may be self-sufficient, instructional managers must assure support by creating policies and programs that bridge instructional competencies to practice. These professional development programs allow newly hired teachers eventually gain instructional competency and well-motivated public-school teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of delivering graduates outfitted with 21st-century abilities is put in question with the work of instructors who are unprepared to play out the standard degree of practice (Yildirim, 2016). The quality of teachers defines the quality of the world's human capital since the teachers are considered human resource inputs (Ginsburg, 2017).

Current researches have been focused on learners' achievement, engagement, and teachers' performance. Still, they have set aside the teachers' instructional competence assessment, which should not be left out of chances. Instructional competence is often undermined as an essential determinant of a pre-service teacher's culmination before becoming a professional teacher. Readiness in terms of instructional competence is the state in which the teachers how prepared to engage with specific teaching behaviors (Lynch et al., 2020). The competencies are significant for providing appropriate structure and proceedings that would make the learning process meaningful. Basic techniques include creating the right questions, facilitating discussion, giving direction, elaborating, and demonstrating, while the necessary actions include planning, structuring, focusing, and managing the classroom. Readiness in providing meaningful learning experiences cannot be developed overnight. It entails appropriate training ground from the universities or colleges for pre-service teachers and school administrators for teachers who have been found insufficiently ready when employed. However, the various training for student-teachers may not be enough to capacitate them when they are already in the field. As these newbie teachers are dispatched to different schools, the administrators' leadership can significantly influence the pedagogical practices of these teachers (Li et al., 2016). The study by Montebon (2015) among the pre-service teachers revealed that they generally have a moderate to a high level of needs in terms of instructional competence. Specifically, the area with the highest level of demand is the ability to facilitate classroom discussions using an appropriate technique. In a study participated by the faculty members of a particular university, it turned out that teachers considered themselves very satisfactory in utilizing and demonstrating instructional competence. Still, the students perceived their practices as only adequate (Punongbayan & Bauyon, 2015). Hence, the study suggests that teachers should exert more effort to become excellent in providing instruction in their respective classes. Teachers must possess a high level of competencies to provide their students with the necessary education. Professional knowledge and competencies are the prerequisites for further meaningful work that do not directly determine the subject's activity. The current position depends on the motivation system, attitude towards tasks, activity content, and object. To be considered ready, teachers must complete an assessment of the instructional competence with the current philosophy of learning, and an evaluation of the proficiency requirements for teachers and learners, ensuring to meet the learners' educational needs and provide that teacher are competent to facilitate learning. Instructional competence is the bases for framing appropriate instructional methods, strategies, and models. Along with all of these, instructional competence is vital to the success of an effective teaching-learning process since novice teachers today enter the profession with differing levels of preparation, experience, and expertise (Bartell, 2018).

The World Bank Group, through the Australian Aid in 2016, conducted a study entitled "Assessing Basic Education Service Delivery in the Philippines: Highlights from Findings Regarding Teachers," which underscored that the teachers' performance on content knowledge assessment was poor. The significant findings of the study concerning the K to 12 Curriculum are that the educators had some information yet needed higher critical thinking skills; new instructors did not perform altogether preferable or more regrettable over progressively experienced educators, and results from educator qualities, necessities appraisal indicated that educators were not exceptionally mindful of their inadequacy and measures on the instructional readiness among the teachers has been developed. According to the World Bank (2016) report, the professional development for public school teachers in the Philippines is inadequate. Most teachers receive in-service training, but the duration is shorter than in other countries; often, mass training in school or DepEd offices, outside experts are rarely used, was not aligned with school or teacher needs. The school principals commonly conduct classroom teaching observation but lack support for subject knowledge – mostly support for teaching practice. Presently, the Department of Education in the Philippines has issued the Teacher Induction Program (TIP) Policy to ensure continuing professional development and progress of the newly hired teachers based on the principle of lifelong learning and the Department's

commitment to the development of new and beginning teachers (DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2017). The TIP framework is represented by the Input, Process, Output (IPO) diagram. The Input parameter pertains to the result of the inventory to diagnose the current competencies of the newly hired teachers as to their KSAVs, level of experience, different teaching needs, and goals. Assessing teachers' instructional competence is a valid and appropriate activity for the teaching profession to predetermine what Teacher Induction Programs (TIPs) meet the needs of the teachers before they handle classes for the first time. The DepEd had placed various TIPs in all its delivery units; however, measuring the instructional competence of the newly hired teachers was not included in the framework.

This research explored the teacher's instructional competencies to suggest possible constructs for a scale that measures their instructional competence. Although global measures exist, there is a need to develop standards through a practice-oriented approach that highlights core aspects of teachers' instructional competence, which may help or hinder an excellent teaching performance. Very little research, predominantly based on the western context, has been conducted on the construct of teacher instructional competence. This study directly explored the lived experience of teachers' instructional competence to understand better what aspects of the work are aiding or thwarting teaching among the newly hired; this leads to understanding the instructional competencies of teachers. Hence, the researcher was determined to conduct this qualitative study that identified the teacher's instructional competence, which can support the development of a highly reliable measure in the context and the norms of the newly hired public school teachers. The study's findings brought attention to the critical issue of the teacher's instructional competence, shaping how teachers approach their teaching, interact with their students, and ultimately perform work with the utmost vigor. A holistic approach to education does not exclude the educators themselves. This concept does not apply only to the students because the school is a learning community comprising students, teachers, administrators, and management. The process involved in facilitating students' learning provides insightful learning experiences for all the stakeholders, albeit of a different nature. Any meaningful educational endeavor is incomplete without factoring in the instructional readiness of the teachers. The instructional competence based upon the explored experiences of the newly hired teachers and the views of the instructional managers is deemed beneficial. This current study may contribute to the generation of new knowledge on the instructional competence of teachers. The results of this study may provide an abundant knowledge base to inform schools and educational policymakers about how teachers play a critical role in student learning and achievement. This research may reveal how newly hired teachers instruct students as the cornerstone in building effective schools. Moreover, exploring teachers' instructional competencies will enable educational settings to maximize student learning, thus focusing on improving teachers' expertise, especially in today's complex learning environment.

OBJECTIVES

The study sought to uncover the instructional competence among newly hired public school teachers. It aimed to suggest possible useful constructs for developing instructional competencies. Through the themes that emerged from the discussions, interested parties can assess whether a soon-to-be hired teacher is instructional ready or competent to face the class. In particular, this study wanted to answer the question: *What instructional competencies does a newly hired teacher possess to demonstrate the readiness and efficacy of the required skills?*

METHODS

Research design

In exploring the teachers' perspectives, the researcher employed a qualitative research design from the viewpoints of the instructional managers and the school principals on the instructional competence of the newly hired teachers in the public school. Qualitative research allows the researcher to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings of the participants lived and told experiences in a close interview (Dela Fuente, 2021).

Participants

The participants were purposively selected based on inclusion criteria set by the researchers which believes to be the one that could provide in-depth meaning of the experiences on the explored phenomenon (Dela Fuente, 2019) the data intended for the study. The inclusion criteria of the survey for FGD 1 – must be a teacher in a public school either in elementary, junior, and senior high school or in the Inclusive Education programs with at least one (1) to three (3) years length of service. Moreover, for the FGD 2 – must be a school principal with a minimum of 10 years in handling a public school and or an instructional manager with experience as a Personnel Selection Board (PSB) member who is an expert in the screening of teacher – applicants, specifically in their instructional competence. This study includes twelve (12) participants, following Castro (2010), which said that 2 to 12 research participants are enough to reach saturation.

Ethical consideration

This research ensured voluntary participation and ensured that the rights to withdraw from the study at any stage was made understood to the participants. The researcher also made it clear to avoid using offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable languages in the formulation of focus group questions. Privacy and anonymity of the participants were considered. The information provided by the key informants was transparent only to them, and data's confidentiality, integrity, and availability were observed. All participants were revisited to let them verify the veracity of the analysis, this was ensured in the members' check form. A peer debriefing was also performed to ensure consistency and appropriateness of the themes against the significant statements of the participants. The study only began when the participants voluntarily acknowledged and agreed to the informed consent and protocols.

Research instrument

Under the guidance of Keneddy (2006), the researcher prepared an interview guide. To establish the validity of the research instrument, five (5) experts, qualitative research practitioners, and research and field experts performed content validity of the interview questions and checked the suitability of the items that captured the underlying dimensions of the teacher's instructional competence. Moreover, the recommendations from the validators were considered to improve the constructs of the instrument before its administration.

Data collection

This study used Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gather needed data. The focus group provided an insight into how the newly hired teachers, instructional managers and school principals perceived the competencies, principles, experiences, and practices specified in the instructional competence of a newly hired.

Data analysis

Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was followed to analyze the data from which the findings were derived. The TCA is a set of strategies for analyzing textual material and identifying themes (Creswell, 2003). Primarily defined as "a strategy for detecting, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" as an independent qualitative descriptive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher adhered to the steps of theme analysis defined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely, familiarization of the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing up.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' instructional competence, as revealed in this study, is composed of reliable attributes from the Self-efficacy Theory of Bandura (1997), which are baseline instructional standards, drivers of instructional improvement, transition of instructional quality, Strategizing for Quality Instruction, Managing Uncertainties, and Health and Well-being. These can help newly hired teacher assess their instructional competence as they venture into their teaching career in public school. Participants could determine how they became instructional competent from their rich experiences during their entry-level years of teaching. The participants have identified the different instructional competencies that a newly hired teacher must possess when they want to venture into their teaching profession in the public schools, and these include baseline instructional standards, drivers of instructional improvement, strategizing for quality instruction, the transition of instructional quality, managing uncertainties and health and well-being. Based on the participants' narrations, they could determine how they acquired and improved their instructional competencies.

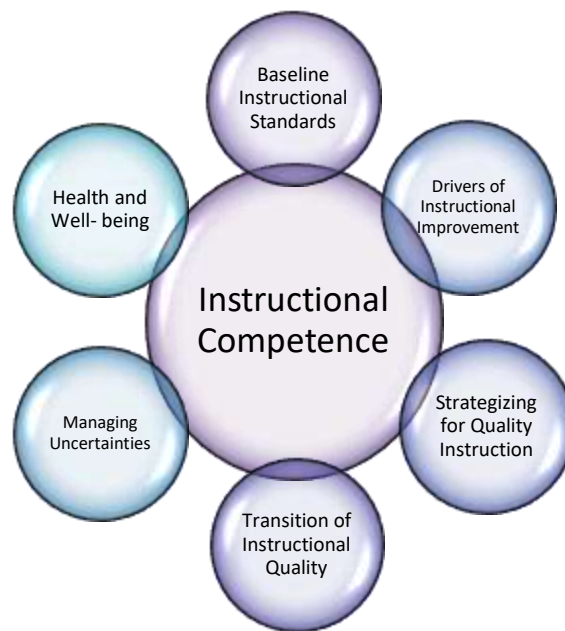


Figure 1. Emergent themes

Presented in Figure 2 is the graphical presentation of the contextualized definition of the theory or the emergent themes from the participants' experiences. The mode of acquisition of the different instructional competence was included in conveying explicitly how the participants developed their instructional competence.

Instructional competence of the newly hired teachers

Teachers have the power to change their learners' lives for the better. To best inspire the learners towards greatness and show them what they are capable of, a teacher must be fully aware and acquire the different instructional competence needed to transpire a meaningful teaching-learning process. Newly hired public school teachers need to be equipped with the baseline standards on the instructional competence being acquired based on what they have gained. The transition of acquired skills can be developed along the way by gaining different experiences. To reinforce academic instructional competence, there are many ways a teacher can strategize toward achieving instructional quality. The motivating factors, how a teacher manages uncertainties, and the health and well-being of a teacher can determine adequate instructional competence. Participants have accounted from their experiences for the instructional competencies that a newly hired teacher must possess when employed in the public school.

Theme I: Baseline instructional standards

The baseline instructional standards that the participants have identified are the following: manages lessons through effective planning, utilizes technology in the class appropriately and responsibly, engages the learners in the learning process, masters the art of questioning, manages positive classroom behavior, designs learning assessment and evaluation based on the targeted outcomes, manages time effectively communicates well to deliver desirable learning outcomes, uses variations of media and materials of instruction, uses appropriate learning activities and provides the lesson effectively. According to the participants, these instructional competencies were possessed even before a teacher was deployed from the public school. Their pre-service teaching matters in the acquisition of these required skills. These instructional competencies can be acquired through past experiences, and self-instructed activities. It could be noted that the most influential source of efficacy information is the mastery of experiences, according to Bandura (1997), because they provide the most direct, authentic evidence that a teacher can gather the personal resources necessary to succeed in the teaching career. The basic instructional competence is in cognizance with the findings of Umugiraneza et al. (2016) as they pointed out that the possession of instructional competence such as planning the lesson, utilization of appropriate strategies, classroom management, and practical evaluation of learning was vital in the successful performance of the tasks and outcomes expected from a schoolteacher. The findings also parallel the assertion of Schumacher et al. (2015) that teachers should facilitate the instruction so that the learners can cope with the standard demands in the curriculum. It takes a lot of skills and commitment from the teachers to go down to the level of the learners and help them progress by the set competencies that must be mastered at the end of a grading period.

Theme II: Drivers of instructional improvement

Quality teaching and student learning are tightly interconnected. Together they form two sides of a triangle. The third side of this triangle is often overlooked but is also integral to teaching quality and student learning—quality instruction and teacher preparation (Mahon, 2016). In improving instructional competence, there should be a goal that a teacher must focus on. It emerged from the debate that teachers are motivated to improve as they track the learners' achievements, the promotion of lifelong learning, the decision to take action to learn, and the need to align goals and activities with the system. From the participants' shared experiences, the teachers tried to improve their instructions as they assessed their learners' achievement. It was also driven by their innate desire to learn and the incorporation of the philosophy of life-long learning. It is still in cognizance with the mastery experiences under Bandura's theory of Self-efficacy (1997). They become motivated based on what they have experienced in the field. When newly hired teachers are being deployed in their respective stations, they can now experience self-actualization on what instructional practices must be carried out for their learners. The drivers of instructional improvement are instructional competence that pertains to tracking learners' progress and achievements based on learning outcomes, having a culture of lifelong learning, and the innate desire to learn or improve skills. According to the participants, teachers will have a clear picture of whether they are effective teachers based on the performance of their learners. Empirical research on learning performance traditionally has examined how teachers and their background characteristics contribute to students' performance on standardized tests (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010); although learning performance has been viewed recently as a multidimensional factor (Chetty, 2012), teachers are expected to continuously develop their instructional competence for a notable and worthwhile learning experience for the students (Baron, 2010). The findings in this study, paralleled with the work of Welch and Napoleon (2015), emphasized that teachers must have a strong disposition regarding their behaviors, beliefs, and practices. These are for verbal and non-verbal actions toward their learners, co-educators, and stakeholders. To improve one's teaching capacity over time in a sustainable way is more about mindset, curiosity, and a sense of progress and belonging (Heick, 2018). This implies that improvement will only happen when teachers see the need to develop teaching practices. Reflecting on one's instructional competence alone will drive them to find ways to improve their practices.

Theme III: Transition of instructional quality

To grow, learning from peers and involving through programs that can scaffold teachers' instructional competence is essential. One should not stay a newbie throughout the teaching career. Hence, the participants deem it necessary to initiate actions for their professional growth. According to Redman (2019), effective transitions are critical for effective classroom instructional management; newly hired teachers are expected to employ the theories and experiences they have learned during their pre-service teaching. In theory, Bandura (1997) postulated the second source of self-efficacy, the so-called vicarious experiences, can generate efficacy beliefs in observers that they too can attain success through persistence and effort. However, such vicarious experiences, which rely on social comparisons and modelling, are postulated to be less dependable sources of information about one's capabilities than experienced mastery. This means teachers became self-efficient at this level through thorough observation and modeling from the other veteran teachers. The results showed that instructional quality could be aided through the personal endeavors of the teachers and maximizing the support they can get from significant others. The transition of instructional quality includes the following competence: initiating actions for professional development, learning from peers, the existence of programs in schools or division that scaffolds teachers' skills, and establishing a connection with the stakeholders. In this study, personal initiatives for professional growth were highlighted; however, it also emerged that there is a need for the teachers to receive scaffolding. It is in cognizance with the findings of Hökkä et al. (2017), who posited that individual needs must be understood by the educational agency so that appropriate assistance can be provided. Teachers always have the innate desire to improve one's craft, particularly since teachers are bounded with a great responsibility for eradicating illiteracy. It is supported by the findings of Czerniawski et al. (2017). Their study pointed out that teachers strongly desire further professional learning. This desire is an offshoot of the teachers' efficacy perceptions, idealized best practices, and influences on the people around them. In the FGDs, participants emphasize the partnership between the teacher and the rest of the school community members. With adequate collaborators in the classroom, teachers develop their interpersonal skills, which is very useful in outsourcing the inadequacies of resources common in public schools. A firm grasp on partnership help teachers easily finds support not only in classroom physical improvement and nurturing among the learners. According to Broomhead (2018), partnerships in school between stakeholders and teachers collectively lead to higher academic achievement and lessen behavior problems among the learners. It is evident as participants emphasized that establishing a connection and partnership among the school community members contributes deeply to the learner's academic progress and enhancement of the instructional competence of a newly hired teacher. Taken together, instructional quality can be aided through the personal endeavors of the teachers and maximizing the support they can get from significant others. In this study, personal initiatives for professional growth were highlighted; however, it also emerged that there is a need for the teachers to receive scaffolding from the Department of Education itself. It is in cognizance with the findings of Hökkä et al., (2017), who posited that individual needs must be understood by the educational agency so that appropriate assistance can be provided. Teachers always have the innate desire to improve one's craft, particularly since teachers are bounded with a great responsibility for eradicating illiteracy. It is supported by the findings of Czerniawski et al., (2017). Their study pointed out that teachers strongly desire further professional learning. This desire is an offshoot of the teachers' efficacy perceptions, idealized best practices, and influences on the people around them.

Theme IV: Strategizing for quality instruction

Realizing that experience is not enough in honing one's instructional competence, various initiatives must be done to improve practices. According to the participants, this includes receiving recognition for remarkable achievements, which encourages teachers to do even better and motivates other teachers to strive harder; by practicing self-reflection; conducting research-based innovations and strategies; taking advantage of professional growth opportunities; having a positive connection with the learners, learning best practices, engagement in collaboration and working on teams, projecting authority and leadership and receiving positive reinforcements. These competencies can be attained through modelling and observing other instructional best practices. The acquisition of the appropriate instructional competence for quality instruction requires serious labor; hence, it is right that teachers must adopt strategies that help maintain them. In the present educational landscape, every area in the teaching-learning process has evolved and requires adequate instructional competence (Cull, 2019). Teachers

must continually strive to find ways to provide appropriate classroom instructions. In theory, Bandura (1997) emphasized that an individual will become Self – efficient through vicarious experiences; this means that whenever a neophyte teacher witnesses success from other teachers, the neophyte teacher will be inspired that they, too, from their capacity can achieve their goals. Teachers who access high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning can improve learner outcomes (Kearney, 2016). Research inclusive of teacher instructional competence and qualifications has found substantial correlations between the desire to achieve instructional quality and knowledge on developing instructional quality (Goe, 2007; Palardy & Rumberger, 2008).

The participants shared some strategies that are essential for quality instruction. These include the provision of recognition for a job well done, self-reflection, utilization of research-based innovations, opportunities for professional growth, establishing connections, learning from the best practices of others, collaborating with others, respect for authorities and the leadership strategies, and taking hold on positive reinforcement. The participants pointed out several strategies to achieve quality instruction. The majority of these come from the teacher's innate intention to improve. The theme that emerged falls under Bandura's (1997) verbal persuasion. According to the theory, self-efficacy can be supported by observing others who would serve as role models. Seeing people similar to oneself and supported by sustained effort raises one's belief that they, too, possess the capabilities to master the activities needed for success in that area. It also parallels the points stressed by Lewis (2016) that the teacher's environment and personal disposition impact instruction on a significant scale. Further, collaboration with others improves instructional practices. The assessment and appraisal system also influence teachers' practices in schools. Davis et al. (2019) pointed out that the assessment and appraisal system are significant only when personal reflection is involved. The appraisal system might be appropriately crafted, but it would still be futile without the willingness to improve. The instructional competence can be enhanced not only through role modeling but also through verbal persuasion and states of emotional and physiological stress, which may result from one's interaction with peers. If the school administrators believe in the teachers' capacity, they would most likely strive to improve their instructional competence and become more ready to face their learners. The provision of due recognition for achievements emerged during the discussion to motivate the new teachers to improve instruction. It supported the findings of Goldhaber (2015), who purported that teachers have faced challenges in performance assessment. Because of this, they are more exposed to stress that may affect performance. Hence, it would help that schools should provide an avenue for value-added evaluation, which may include rewards and recognition for exemplary performance. The use of self-reflection also surfaced as a means of improving the instructional competence of newly hired teachers. This finding paralleled the assertion of Snead and Freiberg (2019) when they explored the use of self-assessment among pre-service teachers. It was found that assessing one's performance or reflecting on one's practices would provide the new teachers with genuine feedback. This feedback would eventually lead to deeper self-reflection on one's teaching practices. Improving instructional competence can also be acquired through professional growth opportunities and peer collaboration. These emergent themes parallel the findings of Martin et al. (2016) that peer collaboration helped new teachers improve their instructional competence.

Theme V: Managing uncertainties

For the newbies, the theories are not enough to be utilized in the field. It takes much practical work to manage the vast uncertainties in the area. Teaching is evidently and inevitably uncertain. No teacher can be sure how a lesson will go or what a student will learn. Much more, a teacher cannot be sure which teaching approach will be most successful with a particular group of students. Most newly hired teachers are unprepared as they face the real battle inside the classroom. It emerged from the discussions that teachers became uncertain because of the influence that arises when they can never be sure how student understanding is progressing, let alone whether what they do will have its desired effects on students. However, the uncertainty goes beyond doubts about influence. Teachers also face delays in instructional content, ranging from difficult choices about what to teach, to imperfect understandings of difficult concepts, to the fragile foundations of the academic disciplines themselves. For this emergent theme, the revelations of the participants were paralleled to Bandura's (1997) concept of emotional and physiological states. The fourth and final source of efficacy information comes from one's physiological and emotional feedback during performance, particularly physical activity. Individuals interpret stress reactions because

excessive physiological and emotional arousal can often negatively impact performance. Hence, individuals expect greater success when they are not overcome by stress reactions than if they are tense. Responses to stressors, such as uncertainties, influence one's performance. Positive emotions, for instance, would boost confidence in the teachers' capabilities. The theme is in cognizance with the findings of Corbo (2016) that emphasize shifting individual paradigms for the benefit of the entire organization. Personal expectations should be set aside, and the direction of one's actions and plans should be geared towards realizing the school's goals. Teachers should not think of personal convenience but should be one with the system. Moreover, the teachers' beliefs for educational change should go with their practices. To be truly useful, teachers must align their beliefs with the goals and objectives of the educational sector. From then on, these beliefs should shape their practices, which are intended to improve student outcomes (Buehl & Beck, 2015).

Theme VI: Teacher's health and well-being

Any profession is bound to have its stresses, and teaching is no different. According to Buchanan (2012), educators experience significantly more stress than professionals in other sectors and suffer more often from mental health problems. The final major theme that emerged was about a teacher's health and well-being as part of the instructional competence. This includes maintaining emotional sanity, physical and mental health matters, practicing positivity and optimism, being passionate and committed, and maintaining one's pleasing personality. Today teaching is one of the most stressful occupations. High-stress levels affect teacher health and well-being, causing teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and some of the highest turnover rates ever (Cox et al., 2018). Stress has negative consequences for teachers and results in lower achievement for students and higher costs for schools (Truesdale, 2018). Managing emotional sanity can help teachers develop coping and awareness skills to reduce anxiety and depression and improve health (Ginsburg, 2017). The participants also pointed out individual intervention or self-care, which affirms Cull's (2019) belief that it is an approach that teaches individuals practices to manage stress and coping mechanisms. Several programs and policies are proven to help teachers reduce stress, improve well-being and student outcomes, and even save schools money. These include: mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers can improve teacher satisfaction and retention, as well as student academic achievement (Cox et al., 2018); workplace wellness programs have resulted in reduced health risk, health care costs, and absenteeism among teachers (Ginsburg, 2017); social-emotional learning programs that improve behavior and help reduce teacher stress and create more positive engagement with students (Truesdale, 2018); and mindfulness or stress management programs can help teachers develop coping and awareness skills to reduce anxiety, depression, and improved health (Cox et al., 2018). Moreover, a teacher's positive belief that they can make a difference in the academic performance of students by emphasizing academics and learning, trusting parents and students to cooperate in the process, and believing in their capacity to overcome difficulties and react to failure with resilience and perseverance can minimize teaching-related stress (Woolfolk, 2018). Passionate teachers are distinguished by their commitment to their student's achievement, while commitment is an essential element of successful teaching (Cox et al., 2018). Committed teachers are concerned with the development of their students, and they profoundly struggle with how to keep students learning. According to Vickers (2017), not all teachers will have the same level of competence in all areas from the outset. These emergent themes revealed by the participants can help build and sustain the relevant instructional competencies.

Contextualized definition of instructional competence from the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory

Considerable research has shown that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy experience higher levels of job satisfaction, lower levels of job-related stress, and face fewer difficulties in dealing with students' misbehaviors (Caprara, 2013). Thus, understanding the main antecedents of self-efficacy may have important payoffs in working for teachers' well-being and instructional effectiveness and improvement. Based on the participant's responses in the FGD, the following themes on instructional competence surfaced: There were baseline instructional standards that must be possessed by an entrant teacher to be considered ready to face the challenges in the actual classroom scenario and to facilitate successful learning outcomes. A newly hired teacher or those who belong to the entry-

level position should be at least able to manage lessons through effective planning. The participants viewed effective plans as a precursor to effective lesson delivery. The use of technology in the class should be appropriate, and it should be responsibly utilized. It is undeniable that millennials or young teachers are very tech-savvy; however, it should not be the reason to take instructional matters for granted. The technology should be utilized to improve instructional outcomes. The teachers should also be capable of engaging the learners in the learning process. Another is that an entrant teacher should demonstrate mastery in the art of questioning. Effective questioning should lead to productive discussions and learning in class. Classroom management should also be taken into consideration; the environment in the class influences the learning process. The design of the learning assessments should be based on the target outcomes. The results of the evaluation are deemed vital for the improvement of instructional competence. A newly hired teacher should also possess effective time management. This skill is essential to maximize the use of resources and the implementation of the target competencies.

Another necessary skill is effective communication. Transfer of learning is best facilitated when teachers can convey the instruction in a way that the learners easily understand. Technological advancements require teachers to use varied resources to motivate learners. It calls for the creative skills of the teachers to use mixed media and materials for instructions. The varied resources should be used to develop appropriate learning activities that optimize the learning process. Finally, entrant teachers should be able to deliver the lessons effectively. Resources might be creatively done and sufficient; however, if the teachers lack practical delivery skills, the target instructional outcomes are unlikely to be achieved. It emerged from the discussions that activities that can facilitate the transition of instructional quality should be adopted. Newly hired teachers should not just remain a newbie in the field but also find ways to improve their skills. They should be involved in professional development programs, learn from their peers, and establish connections with stakeholders to achieve this. The school and division heads should also provide scaffolding for the new teachers to become more effective in their classes. It surfaced from the discussions that there is a need to strategize to achieve quality instruction. For the teachers to be more motivated to improve their craft, the school heads deem it essential to provide due recognition for their achievements. On the other hand, teachers should also reflect on their performance; only through self-reflection can one assess the loopholes during instruction and further do the necessary means to improve. They should also engage themselves in research and avail opportunities for professional growth. Establishing a good relationship with peers and learners always work. Newly hired teachers should connect with the learners, learn from the best practices of others, collaborate, and work well with others. They should also exert authority over their students and demonstrate leadership. Positive reinforcement from the school heads, the learners, and other teachers would also help the new teachers to improve. Newly hired teachers should also work on their way to becoming drivers of instructional improvement. They should at least demonstrate efficient means of tracking the learners' progress. New teachers should also cultivate a culture of lifelong learning and a desire for new understandings. The newly hired teachers should also be able to manage uncertainties in the field. They must align their goals and actions with the system to achieve this. For them to be on track with the mandates of the Department of Education, they should review and embrace the standards and guidelines of the Department. They should work within limits and streamline the standards. To withstand the challenges in the teaching field and maintain the expected instructional competence, the newly hired teachers should also maintain good health and well-being. The demands in the teaching field are emotionally draining; hence, there is a need to maintain emotional sanity. Physical fitness should be retained; good health radiates good positivity. Newly hired teachers should also commit themselves to this line of work. Finally, maintaining a pleasing personality makes one more confident to take on the tasks expected from them.

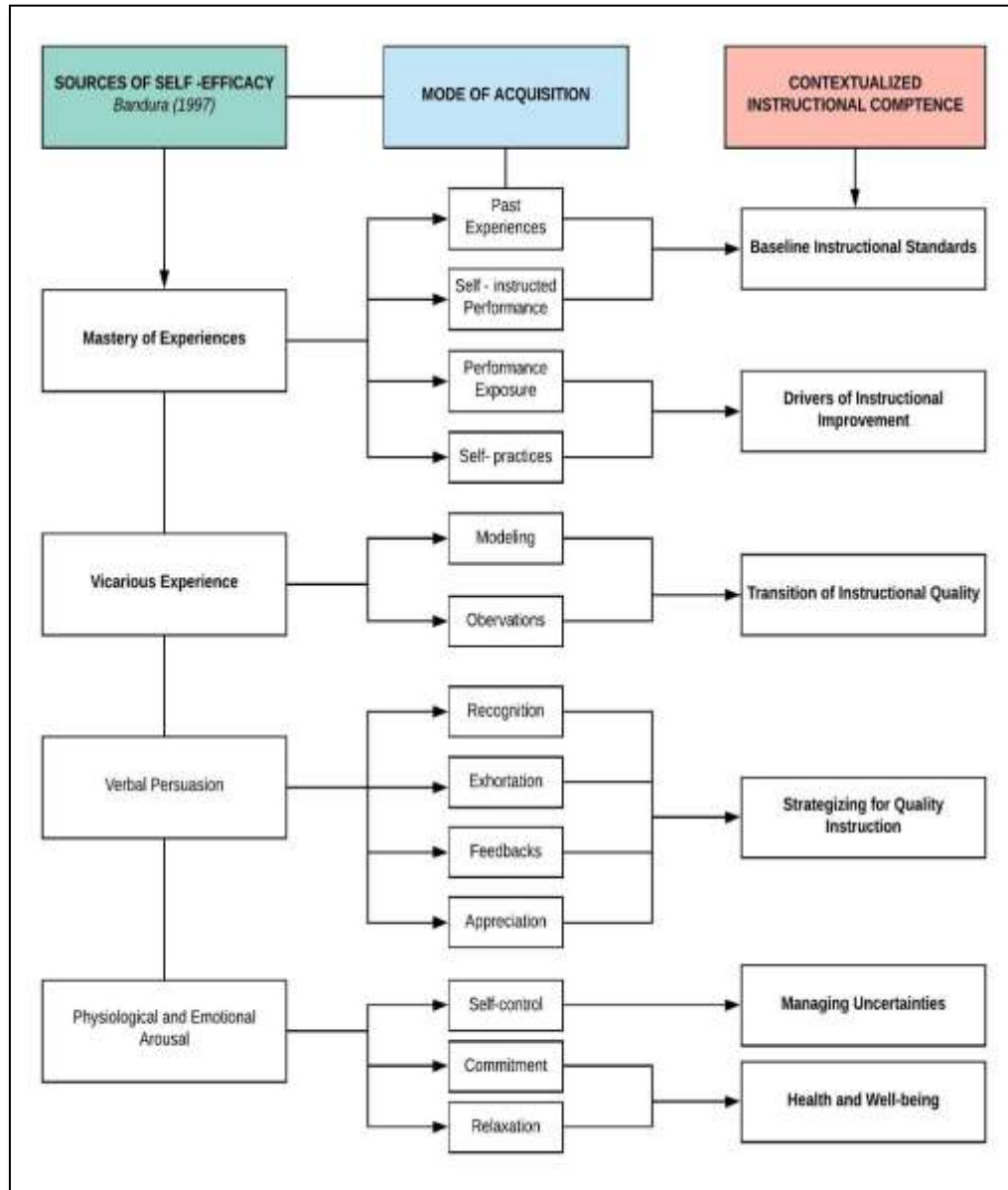


Figure 2. Contextualized definition of instructional competence from the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers' instructional competence, as revealed in this study, is composed of reliable attributes from the Self-efficacy Theory of Bandura (1997), which are Baseline Instructional Standards, Drivers of Instructional Improvement, Transition of Instructional Quality, Strategizing for Quality Instruction, Managing Uncertainties, and Health and Well-being. These can help newly hired teacher assess their instructional competence as they venture into their teaching career in public school. Participants could determine how they became instructional competent

from their rich experiences during their entry-level years of teaching. The participants have identified the different instructional competencies that a newly hired teacher must possess when they want to venture into their teaching profession in the public schools, and these include baseline instructional standards, drivers of instructional improvement, strategizing for quality instruction, the transition of instructional quality, managing uncertainties and health and well-being. Based on the participants' narrations, they could determine how they acquired and improved their instructional competencies. Teachers have the power to change their learners' lives for the better. To best inspire the learners towards greatness and show them what they are capable of, a teacher must be fully aware and acquire the different instructional competence needed to transpire a meaningful teaching-learning process. Newly hired public school teachers need to be equipped with the baseline standards on the instructional competence being acquired based on what they have gained. The transition of acquired skills can be developed along the way by gaining different experiences. To reinforce academic instructional competence, there are many ways a teacher can strategize toward achieving instructional quality. The motivating factors, how a teacher manages uncertainties, and the health and well-being of a teacher can determine adequate instructional competence.

IMPLICATIONS

Theory

Teachers' self-efficacy has progressively gained an important role in school psychology research due to its implications for teaching effectiveness, instructional practices, and student's academic achievement (Klassen, 2009; Klassen & Tze, 2014). Based on this, it becomes extremely relevant to understanding what influences a teacher's belief in successfully coping with tasks, instructional practices, and challenges related to the teaching role. Participants revealed that teachers' values and beliefs have effectively aided newly hired teachers' self-efficacy in developing and cultivating instructional competencies. Thus, Self-efficacy is a personal belief in one's capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of competencies.

Practice

The competencies revealed in this study are essential for the academic institutions to align their pre-service training structures closer to the actual scenarios in the real classrooms so that new teachers would at least be ready when deployed in the field. Whatever instructional competence gap that would not be addressed during their pre-service training should be bridged in the Teacher Induction Program in every school that would be hiring entry-level teachers; in this way, the newly hired teachers would be assisted with effective and efficient strategies in handling their classes. Above all, the learning outcomes would not be sacrificed with instructional-ready teachers. After all, the teaching-learning process is never an avenue for trial and error.

Future Research

This study only begins to reveal from the experiences of the participants' various instructional competencies the snapshots they have possessed during their entry-level years in public school teaching. As the focus group discussions demonstrated, the different core ideas would be a source for quantitatively expounding this study to create scale constructs. Thus, future research can be conducted using the insights made by the participants through factor analysis to formulate a scale that will substantiate and validate the results of this study by empirical evidence. The scale would form a reliable measurement tool that gauges the readiness of the newly hired public school teachers in their instructional competence, a good data source for conducting a teacher induction program. Based on the relevance of self-efficacy for developing instructional competence, future research may also address the role of other variables that influence the development of the competencies. For example, it would be of great interest to expand the study of teachers' instructional competence by considering their emotional intelligence and organizational mindfulness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are viewed to be essential.

Policymakers. The findings of this study inform the policymakers to revisit and review policies concerning teachers' instructional competence. Determining the instructional competence of a newly hired teacher will specifically point out what type of teacher induction program they need to attend to maximize the goals of developing and enriching the teacher's competence. *Curriculum and Instructional Managers.* While instructional managers are involved in setting clear goals, managing curriculum, allocating resources, and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth, the study findings can create a punch list in monitoring and assessing the instructional competencies of the teacher. This will guide the instructional leaders on their recommendations for the enhancement of instructional practices and as well as in determining potential intervention programs or self-directed learning opportunities to help teachers hone their instructional competence. *School Administrators.* The results of this study shall serve as a guide to the school heads in making their school learning action cells on the essential instructional competencies needed by a newly hired teacher. *In-Service Teachers.* Teachers who have been teaching in public schools for considerable years can utilize this study to help them reflect on their instructional practices by doing action research to determine their progress over their years of experience. The findings may also guide the master teachers on the salient points to consider in performing their mentoring and coaching in helping newly hired teachers develop their instructional competencies. *Newly Hired Teachers.* While neophyte teachers experience uncertainties in their teaching practices, this study will assist them in accounting for what instructional competencies they need to develop and to be mastered. Moreover, newly hired teachers can be guided in assessing their instructional readiness and thus appropriately select potential professional development programs to enhance their instructional practices. *Schools for Teacher Education.* Considering the study's findings, the higher education institution can review and put in place relevant and developmental in-house training programs for the pre-service teachers before deployment to ensure readiness in their field studies. *Pre-service Teachers.* The highlighted instructional competencies give the teacher education students information on what the instructional competencies will be possessed and expected when deployed in the field. This directs them to delve deeper into how to transpire educational theories to instructional practice.

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