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Creativity in the Classroom: Discourse of Teachers in the Elementary Grades

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Abstract: This study explored how elementary grade teachers cultivate learners' creativity skills in their classrooms. Participants' narratives reflected both the strategies and challenges faced by teachers in fostering these skills. Eight elementary school teachers from Tugbok District participated in this phenomenological inquiry, which utilized in-depth interviews as its primary data source. Using thematic analysis, two main strategies emerged for cultivating creativity skills: interactive learning and project-based learning. Regarding the challenges teachers faced, the study identified time constraints and heavy workload as key themes. Based on these strategies and challenges, the study's findings suggested two insights: accentuating time-bounded lessons and reducing teacher workload. From the outset, this study aimed to provide insights into how elementary grade teachers cultivate students' creativity skills in the classroom. The new knowledge gained from this study is significant for enhancing the quality of education delivered in schools

Keywords: *Creativity, Classroom, Discourse of Teachers, Elementary Grades.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-changing world, helping learners develop creativity is both helpful and necessary. When teachers encourage creative thinking, they're giving students the skills to tackle problems from new angles, challenge the status quo, and express their ideas boldly. It's all about creating a classroom where curiosity is king, experimentation is welcomed, and students feel safe to explore, collaborate, and even fail without fear.

Explaining how a creative classroom environment benefits student in multiple ways, Edsys (2017) pointed out that a classroom that nurtures innovation also strengthens communication skills. Open discussions, group brainstorming, and respectful debates don't just spark fresh ideas, they teach students to appreciate different viewpoints and think outside the box..

MoreoverKasiga School (2019) highlighted how creativity isn't just an extra skill but a key part of a student's overall growth, tying together academics, emotions, and social development. The school's research shows that when classrooms embrace imaginative thinking, learning becomes more dynamic and students actually retain and use what they learn in real-world situations. But it's not just about grades, creative expression also builds emotional intelligence. It boosts confidence, sharpens communication, and helps students understand different viewpoints, making them more empathetic and open-minded.

Furthermore, Canva Team (2020) noted out with with technology and society evolving so fast, today's students need to think outside the box to keep up. Teachers, whether in physical classrooms or online, play a huge role in fostering that creativity, especially since tech tools now make innovation easier than ever. Kamphylis et al. (2009) emphasized that teachers serve as vital creativity role models. Their own creative behaviors and attitudes directly influence how students develop these skills.

Meanwhile, Hosseini and Watt (2010) stressed that teachers need proper professional development opportunities to effectively foster creativity in their classrooms. Together, these perspectives show that while teachers naturally impact students' creative growth through their example, this potential is maximized when educators receive specific training and support in creative teaching methods.

Similarly, Krueger (2022), enumerated four compelling reasons why teachers should prioritize building creativity skills such as it boosts student motivation by making learning more engaging and goal-oriented; it enhances cognitive development by strengthening higher-order thinking skills, especially when combined with technology; It supports emotional growth by teaching resilience through the trial-and-error process of creative work; and it can re-engage disinterested students by tapping into their personal interests and creative potential.

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Unfortunately, Flanders (2019) commented that one of the challenges of teachers in creative classroom is the lack of clear definition as well as ambiguity in the field leads to confusion and uncertainty about creativity and how to implement best practices around creativity that enhance the classroom. According to Safes (2023) several cultural, societal, and systemic barriers suppressed creativity in education. First, societal norms that value conformity and obedience over independent thinking discourage students from taking creative risks. Second, some cultures dismiss creativity as a non-essential "luxury," prioritizing rote memorization and standardized testing instead, systems that inherently sideline critical thinking and innovation.

Exploring real classroom practices and identifying actionable strategies, this research not only bridges gaps in understanding how teachers foster creativity but also offers practical solutions to overcome systemic and cultural barriers. This inquiry is significant as it addresses the crucial need to nurture creativity in elementary learners, equipping them with essential 21st-century skills

II. METHOD

This study investigated elementary instructors' pedagogical strategies for fostering creativity in inclusive classrooms characterized by student diversity. Through an examination of how educational approaches are adapted to accommodate varying student backgrounds, abilities, and learning modalities, the analysis aimed to identify mechanisms by which creativity is made accessible and meaningful for all participants. Employing a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the research elicited teachers' lived experiences, thereby illuminating their pragmatic approaches, challenges, and innovations in cultivating creativity within the constraints of real-world educational settings.

In the realm of research, a phenomenological study aims to capture the shared experiences of elementary school teachers as they navigate the world of fostering creativity in their classrooms. It's about understanding how these teachers see, interpret, and encourage creative thinking in all their students. The study shines a light on the teaching methods they prioritize and the hurdles they encounter while trying to spark innovation within the confines of a standardized education system. By delving into these real-life experiences, we can uncover the personal meanings teachers attach to developing creativity and how they adapt their approaches to make it accessible for every student.

As Tomaszewski et al. (2020), building on Flood's (2010) work, point out, this type of qualitative research is excellent for getting to the heart of lived experiences. It gives us a deeper understanding of how teachers' strategies in diverse classrooms connect with both their own views and those of their students. Overall, it reveals the profound reasons behind their dedication to improving the quality of education in varied learning environments.

In this phenomenological study, there were eight (8) elementary school teachers from Tugbok District were involved. The participants have been teaching for at least three years, and the researcher picked them randomly to get a good mix of perspectives. During in-depth interviews, teachers shared their pedagogical strategies and the challenges encountered while fostering creativity in their elementary-grade student. Drawing upon Fontana and Frey's (2000) assertion regarding the adaptability of in-depth interviews, this methodology proved particularly well-suited for ethnographic exploration. Specifically, these interviews served as a means to investigate how educators cultivate and sustain effective learning environments tailored to the diverse needs present within heterogeneous classrooms. The data gathered offers an opportunity to examine the complex teaching strategies employed to manage and support these varied learners.

Moreover, in selecting the research participants, I utilized simple random sampling, a respected method in scientific research ensuring each population member had an equal opportunity for inclusion. Given the study's focus on teachers' experiences, I adhered strictly to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participating elementary teachers, who received clear explanations of the study's purpose and their right to ask questions. Participants granted me the permission for audio recording of interviews, with assurances of data confidentiality, anonymization, and exclusive use for academic purposes. The research upheld key ethical principles, ensuring integrity while honoring teachers' vulnerability in sharing lived experiences.

As a qualified researcher, my role involves meticulously formulating research questions, conducting in-depth interviews with teachers, and analyzing the resulting data. In this analysis, guided by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and cited in Vinitha (2019), I will categorize and code participants' responses to reveal patterns and deeper meanings. This process focuses particularly on themes related to fostering creativity in the classroom, aiming to shed light on teachers' lived experiences. Specifically, it will illuminate their innovative strategies for promoting creative thinking and the challenges they navigate when balancing creativity with curricular demands. Ultimately, this approach seeks to offer nuanced insights into how elementary educators cultivate creativity among diverse learners, thereby contributing to the broader goal of enhancing creative pedagogy in 21st-century classrooms.,

Further, employing thematic content analysis, as articulated by Dawadi (2020), I meticulously analyzed the data, extracting salient themes that encapsulate the strategies and challenges articulated by teachers regarding the cultivation of creativity within their classrooms. This analytical approach involved a careful, iterative process of reviewing transcribed interviews to discern significant patterns reflective of the teachers' lived experiences, perspectives, and innovative practices aimed at fostering learners' creativity. Furthermore, following the framework delineated by O'Connor and Gibson(2003), the data was

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systematically organized, categorized, and synthesized into overarching themes, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings. The resultant presentation of findings is structured to provide clear, coherent, and insightful perspectives, contributing to a more profound comprehension of how educators nurture creativity and the requisite support mechanisms to bolster these endeavors.

To bolster the trustworthiness and generalizability of the findings, I employed environmental triangulation. This involved gathering data across various elementary school contexts, facilitating a comparison and synthesis of insights derived from diverse instructional settings. This strategy, as highlighted by Vivek (2023), strengthens the credibility of the qualitative outcomes by acknowledging and integrating the varied experiences of teachers implementing creative strategies for learners. The application of environmental triangulation ensures a more holistic understanding of the pedagogical approaches, challenges, and adaptive methods teachers utilize to foster creativity in their students.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section presents the findings of this study, which explores the strategies employed by elementary school teachers in fostering creativity among learners. Through thematic content analysis of the collected data, key themes emerged, revealing the pedagogical approaches and adaptive practices teachers use to nurture creative thinking are as follows:

- *Interactive Learning*

The participants in this study adopted an interactive learning strategy, which they deemed essential for fostering the creativity of learners in the educational environment. This strategy is corroborated by the findings of Sendsteps (2024), who argued that interactive learning serves to connect students with the material by making lessons more engaging and applicable. This aspect is especially significant in modern classrooms, where distractions are frequent and attention spans are often limited. The benefits of this approach go beyond academic achievement, encouraging creativity, boosting engagement, and developing key social skills, including collaboration and communication.

Moreover, Efre (2023) stated that interactive teaching strategies aim to foster engagement in creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. Interactive methods such as games, simulations, and role-playing establish dynamic learning environments where students engage actively instead of passively absorbing information. This methodology not only makes learning more enjoyable but also improves information retention and cultivates vital real-world skills such as collaboration and problem-solving.

- *Project-Based Learning*

A recurring theme concerning teachers in elementary education is their responsibility to nurture the creativity skills of learners in the classroom, notably through Project-based learning. As stated by PowerSchool (2023), this approach serves as an instructional method that allows students to build knowledge and skills through participation in projects focused on challenges and issues they might encounter in real life.

According to Melvin (2022), project-based learning (PBL), also known as project-based instruction, is a student-focused educational method that fosters learning through engaging, real-world, curriculum-related inquiries or challenges. This concept extends beyond merely executing any standard project. The aim is to motivate students to engage with a question or challenge that demands attention and intricate problem-solving capabilities. Likewise, Structural Learning (2022) details that PBL features a dynamic classroom setting in which students attain in-depth content knowledge and develop crucial skills by examining and tackling a complex question, problem, or challenge over a prolonged duration.

In conclusion, this research highlighted that interactive learning and project-based learning are potent strategies for encouraging creativity in elementary school learners by transforming passive classrooms into active spaces of exploration and innovation. Interactive learning enhances creativity, while project-based learning takes this a step further by offering prolonged opportunities for creative problem-solving. Together, these approaches support the development of essential creative competencies in elementary grade students.

In the meantime, the participants faced difficulties in fostering the creativity skills of learners. Despite employing various methods and strategies to enhance the creative abilities and knowledge of elementary students, challenges persist and are discussed in this section. Below are the themes regarding the challenges that teachers encounter in nurturing the creativity skills of learners.

- *Time Constraints*

According to the accounts of the participants, one significant challenge in fostering the creativity skills of learners within the classroom is the issue of time constraints. The participants clearly noted that these time limitations hinder their objective of enhancing students' creativity in the classroom. Leong and Chick (2011) highlighted the common challenge of time constraints that educators around the world encounter when trying to implement creative teaching methods.

- *Heavy Workload*

Another challenge that participants faced in their endeavors to foster creativity skills among learners is the significant workload. According to Saved You a Spot (2021), the increasingly complex demands on teachers' workloads are bound to negatively influence the quality of teaching and learning. The report details how these current demands, including bureaucratic tasks, compliance activities, and prescriptive lesson plans, exhaust teachers' creative energy, leading many to merely 'switch off' to cope, which results in limited capacity for innovative or 'out of the box' teaching strategies.

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In a related observation, Shuo (2019) remarked that while educators inherently grasp and accept the challenging nature of their roles, the overwhelming surge in paperwork and bureaucratic tasks has become unmanageable. Administrative responsibilities, including form-filling and preparation for inspections, now take up an inordinate amount of teachers' time, forcing them to give up personal time, lunch breaks, evenings, and weekends to complete what they perceive as superfluous documentation. This administrative strain results in a significant opportunity cost, as the time spent on paperwork could be redirected towards classroom instruction, lesson planning, or professional development, activities that would directly enhance the learning experience for students.

Consequently, from both the strategies and challenges that the participants encountered in cultivating the creativity skills of learners in the classroom, this study also draw significant and doable insights. Insights offer valuable perspectives on how educators can address the difficulties they encounter in fostering quality learning that could support the teachers' on refining their strategies. The following are the insights of this study: Accentuate time-bounded lesson and reduce workload of teachers. The insights advocates for implementing time-bound, SMART-aligned lessons, where learning objectives are specific, measurable, and community-driven, allowing teachers to adapt creatively while maintaining focus. It also highlights the need to reduce teacher workload by minimizing administrative burdens, integrating technology, and reassessing non-essential tasks, enabling educators to dedicate more energy to innovative and student-centered instruction.

Overall, this study reveals that elementary teachers effectively cultivate student creativity through two key pedagogical approaches: interactive learning strategies and project-based learning approach. However, teachers face significant implementation barriers including restrictive time constraints that limit creative lesson development and excessive administrative workloads that divert energy from instructional innovation. Based on these findings, the study proposes two crucial recommendations: implementing structured yet flexible time-bound lessons using SMART objectives to optimize creative learning within curricular constraints, and systematically reducing non-instructional burdens. These insights highlight both the potential for transformative creative pedagogy and the systemic changes needed to support quality elementary education.

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