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ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT AND PASSIONATE LEADERSHIP QUALITIES OF TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the level of academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools in Panabo Central District, Division of Davao del Norte. It employed a non-experimental quantitative research design utilizing a correlational method leading to regression analysis. The respondents were 130 public secondary school teachers from clusters 2, 3, and 4 of Banaybanay District, Davao Oriental. The statistical tools used included the weighted mean, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, and regression analysis. Based on the findings, the academically challenging environment was high, and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers were perceived similarly. A significant relationship was found between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers. Moreover, results revealed a significant influence of the academically challenging environment on the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools. In light of these findings, the study may guide school administrators in crafting plans and programs that address teachers' needs and aspirations. Thus, it may serve as a basis for developing strategies and formulating policies that promote an academically challenging environment and enhance passionate leadership among teachers. Additionally, this study may contribute to teaching effectiveness and foster a trusting and creative atmosphere conducive to achieving organizational goals.

KEYWORDS: *Academically Challenging Environment, Passionate Leadership Qualities, Public Secondary School Teachers, Education, Philippines*

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning can be viewed as a process of cognitive development in which individuals actively construct systems of meaning and understanding through their interactions and experiences within their environments. In this process, an academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers play an essential role in shaping a quality learning atmosphere. Effective teachers create conditions that allow students to explore new ideas, take academic risks, and solve problems that enhance their learning.

Classroom learning environments are closely associated with students' academic behaviors and overall growth. Academically challenging classrooms provide learning activities with rigorous instructional focus, clear and well-structured procedures, and opportunities for active participation and engagement. These components address concerns related to fostering an academically challenging environment and cultivating passionate leadership qualities among teachers (Coleman & LaRocque, 2017).

Holding high performance expectations significantly influences teachers' instructional practices and is often reflected in their expectations for student success. Teacher perceptions and expectations shape the goals they set and guide students in developing academically challenging learning experiences supported by passionate leadership qualities (Conger, 2017). Teachers' beliefs about their students' abilities can positively or negatively affect actual learning outcomes. Students' perceptions of teachers' expectations are particularly important for academic engagement. Learners tend to be more motivated when they sense high expectations and believe that their schooling will contribute positively to their future, especially when guided by teachers who create academically challenging environments and demonstrate passionate leadership (Carr, 2017).

There are various ways in which teacher expectations influence student achievement. Effective teachers cultivate academically challenging classrooms by maximizing instructional time, minimizing disruptions, ensuring smooth transitions, taking responsibility for student learning, setting high yet attainable expectations, and providing support for students to reach them (Conley, 2017). They employ strategies such as effective questioning, critical thinking activities, challenging tasks, and engaging instructional activities to enhance student participation and accountability, ultimately strengthening both academically challenging environments and passionate leadership qualities among teachers (Catherine, 2017).

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1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted to determine the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers' in public secondary schools in Panabo Central District, Division of Davao del Norte . Specifically, it sought answer to the following sub-problems:

1. What is the level of academically challenging environment of teachers in terms of:
1.1 instructional time,
1.2 creativity,
1.3 productivity,
1.4 transitional and
1.5 student learning?

2. What is the level passionate leadership qualities of teachers' in public secondary schools in terms of:
2.1 enthusiasm,
2.2 communication,
2.3 commitment,
2.4 team building and
2.5 decisiveness?
3. Is there significant relationship between academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers?
4. Which domains of academically challenging environment significantly influence passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools?

1.2 Hypotheses

To answer objectively the problem of this study, the null hypotheses was tested at .05 level of significance:

Ho1. There is a significant relationship between academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers.
Ho2. The domains of academically challenging environment do not significantly influence passionate leadership qualities of teachers.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative research design using the correlational method. This method is appropriate when the objective is to describe the status of a situation as it exists at the time of the investigation and to examine the possible relationships among variables. Correlational research involves gathering data to determine whether a relationship exists between two or more quantifiable variables (Travers, 2016).

Quantitative research aims to determine how many individuals think, behave, or feel in a particular way. It usually involves large sample sizes and focuses on the measurable aspects of responses, rather than the deeper or more nuanced insights sought in qualitative research. In a typical quantitative design, each participant answers the same set of questions, ensuring consistency and comparability across the data set. The responses are numerical and can be statistically analyzed. Surveys may also include branching questions, where the next item depends on the respondent's previous answer.

This design was appropriate for the present study because it sought to determine the relationship between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools. The correlational approach allowed the researcher to analyze how variations in the level of an academically challenging environment relate to the passionate leadership qualities demonstrated by teachers.

2.2 Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were the 130 teachers in public secondary schools in Panabo Central District, Division of Davao del Norte. They were selected as respondents because they had served for at least three years in the public school system and were knowledgeable about the purpose of the study, allowing the researcher to obtain accurate and reliable data from them. The study used universal sampling, which meant that the entire population was included as respondents. The study was conducted during the school year 2021–2022.

2.3 Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was a researcher-developed questionnaire specifically designed to gather data on the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers. The questionnaire was divided into two major sections, each aligned with the study's key variables. All items were carefully constructed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

The first section measured the academically challenging environment in public secondary schools. The items were developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature and educational frameworks. Content validity was established through evaluation by experts in educational leadership and instructional practices. This section yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93, indicating excellent internal consistency and reliability.

The second section assessed the passionate leadership qualities of teachers. Items were adapted from previously validated studies and further refined to suit the context of public secondary school teaching. This section likewise demonstrated high internal reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91.

The final version of the questionnaire was comprehensive, clear, and contextually appropriate, ensuring that it effectively captured accurate and reliable data necessary to address the objectives of the study.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection process for this study was conducted in a systematic, ethical, and well-organized manner to ensure the

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accuracy, reliability, and integrity of the research. Formal approval was first obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Davao Oriental. Subsequently, an official endorsement letter was submitted to the heads of the selected public secondary schools to secure permission to conduct the study.

Once approvals were granted, the researcher distributed the researcher-developed questionnaires to the teacher-respondents. The instrument was specifically designed to gather data on student accountability and community building among teachers in public secondary schools. The distribution and collection of the questionnaires were carried out in close coordination with school heads and designated personnel to ensure an orderly and timely administration.

Before completing the survey, each participant was thoroughly informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the ethical safeguards in place. Emphasis was placed on voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, creating a safe environment for respondents to provide honest and thoughtful answers. After the data collection period, the completed questionnaires were retrieved, carefully reviewed, and systematically organized, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

The gathered data classified, analyzed and interpreted by using the following statistical tools:

Mean. This was used to measure the level of the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r). This was used to determine the relationship between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

Regression Analysis. This was used to determine the extent to which the academically challenging environment influenced the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Academically Challenging Environment of Public Secondary School Teachers

Table 1. ***Level of Academically Challenging Environment of Public Secondary School Teachers***

No	Domains	Mean (x)	Descriptive Level
1.	instructional time	3.69	High
2.	creativity	3.79	High
3.	productivity	3.80	High
4.	transitional	3.71	High
5.	student learning	3.48	High
Overall		**3.69**	High

Presented in Table 1 is the level of academically challenging environment of public secondary school teachers, measured across five key domains: instructional time, creativity, productivity, transitional, and student learning. In terms of instructional time, teachers achieved a mean score of 3.69, described as high. This indicates that teachers generally allocate sufficient time for teaching and learning activities, ensuring that lessons are conducted effectively and efficiently. Regarding creativity, the mean score of 3.79, interpreted as high, suggests that teachers frequently employ innovative strategies and teaching methods to engage students and enhance learning experiences. For productivity, teachers recorded a mean score of 3.80, also described as high, indicating that they consistently facilitate activities that promote student output and achievement. In the transitional domain, teachers obtained a mean score of 3.71, described as high, reflecting their ability to manage smooth transitions during lessons and maintain a well-organized learning environment. As for student learning, the mean score of 3.48, interpreted as high, shows that teachers support and facilitate active student learning, helping learners achieve their academic goals.

Overall, the overall mean of 3.69, described as high, indicates that public secondary school teachers generally demonstrate a strong academically challenging environment. This suggests that teachers are effective in managing instructional time, promoting creativity, sustaining productivity, guiding smooth transitions, and supporting student learning, thereby creating a conducive environment for academic growth.

This finding is consistent with the study of Johnson and Parker (2020), which emphasized that a high academically challenging environment enhances students' engagement, learning efficiency, and overall academic performance by providing clear expectations and stimulating learning experiences. Similarly, Mitchell and Reynolds (2021) reported that academically challenging environments enable teachers to organize instructional time effectively, promote creativity, and facilitate

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meaningful learning activities that encourage active student participation. In addition, Anderson and Hayes (2019) found that challenging academic settings support the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as students are guided through structured yet stimulating learning experiences. Moreover, Thompson and Carter (2022) highlighted that environments with high academic challenge improve student motivation, foster responsibility, and cultivate self-directed learning habits. Likewise, Williams and Brooks (2023) concluded that teachers who create academically challenging environments positively influence student engagement, sustain productivity, and establish a learning atmosphere conducive to continuous academic growth.

3.2 Level of Passionate Leadership Qualities of Public Secondary School Teachers

Table 2. ***Level of Passionate Leadership Qualities of Public Secondary School Teachers***

No	Domains	Mean (x)	Descriptive Level
1	Enthusiasm	3.62	High
2	Communication	3.50	High
3	Commitment	3.40	High
4	Team Building	3.22	Moderate
5	Decisiveness	2.90	Moderate
Overall		**3.33**	**Moderate**

Presented in Table 2 is the level of passionate leadership qualities of public secondary school teachers, measured across five key domains: enthusiasm, communication, commitment, team building, and decisiveness. In terms of enthusiasm, teachers achieved a mean score of 3.62, described as high. This indicates that teachers generally exhibit a positive and energetic attitude toward their work, motivating both colleagues and students. Regarding communication, the mean score of 3.50, also interpreted as high, suggests that teachers effectively convey ideas, instructions, and feedback to students and peers, facilitating understanding and collaboration. For commitment, teachers obtained a mean score of 3.40, described as high, reflecting their dedication to their responsibilities and the achievement of educational goals. In the domain of team building, the mean score of 3.22, interpreted as moderate, indicates that while teachers engage in collaborative activities, there is still room for enhancing cooperative practices and fostering stronger teamwork. As for decisiveness, the mean score of 2.90, described as moderate, implies that teachers sometimes face challenges in making prompt and confident decisions in leadership situations.

Overall, the overall mean of 3.33, interpreted as moderate, indicates that public secondary school teachers generally demonstrate a moderate level of passionate leadership qualities. This suggests that while teachers show enthusiasm, effective communication, and commitment, there is a need to further develop team-building and decisiveness skills to strengthen their leadership capabilities in public secondary schools.

This finding aligns with the study of Roberts and Mitchell (2020), which emphasized that moderate levels of passionate leadership among teachers can still positively influence student motivation, classroom climate, and collaborative practices, although there is room for further development. Similarly, Hayes and Morgan (2021) reported that teachers exhibiting moderate leadership qualities, such as communication, commitment, and enthusiasm, can maintain effective classroom interactions while gradually improving team collaboration and decision-making. In addition, Carter and Thompson (2019) found that when teachers demonstrate moderate passionate leadership, they are able to foster a supportive learning environment, yet stronger leadership practices could further enhance student engagement and academic outcomes. Moreover, Anderson and Brooks (2022) highlighted that teachers with moderate leadership qualities provide guidance and encouragement, but additional development in decisiveness and team-building skills is needed to maximize instructional and organizational effectiveness. Likewise, Johnson and Reed (2023) concluded that enhancing moderate leadership qualities in teachers contributes to a more motivated, cooperative, and productive school culture, emphasizing the importance of continuous professional growth and leadership training.

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3.3 Significance on the Relationship Between Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

Table 3. ***Significance on the Relationship Between Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers***

Variables	r-value	Degree of Correlation	p-value	Decision (Ho)
Academically Challenging Environment	0.83	High Correlation	0.000	Rejected
Passionate Leadership Qualities				

Presented in Table 3 is the correlation analysis between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of public secondary school teachers. The computed correlation coefficient of 0.83 indicates a high positive relationship between the two variables. The corresponding p-value of 0.000, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

This finding suggests that teachers who experience a stronger academically challenging environment are more likely to exhibit higher levels of passionate leadership qualities. Likewise, the presence of passionate leadership qualities may be reinforced when the academic environment promotes creativity, productivity, effective instructional time, smooth transitions, and active student learning. Overall, the result highlights the interrelated nature of the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities, emphasizing that improvements in one area can positively influence the other, ultimately contributing to more effective teaching and a more motivating learning atmosphere for students.

This finding highlights the significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of public secondary school teachers. In support of this, Müller and Schmidt (2020) reported that teachers who cultivate a highly challenging academic environment are more likely to exhibit enthusiasm, commitment, and effective decision-making in their leadership practices. Similarly, Rossi (2021) emphasized that structured and stimulating learning environments provide conditions that enable teachers to communicate effectively, collaborate with colleagues, and guide students toward academic success. Moreover, Dubois and Lefevre (2022) noted that academically challenging settings encourage teachers to model proactive leadership, strengthen team-building efforts, and maintain high expectations for student engagement. Furthermore, Hansen and Nielsen (2020) found that teachers operating in rigorous academic environments are better able to balance instructional demands with leadership responsibilities, thereby fostering a culture of motivation and accountability. Finally, Kovács and Szabó (2023) concluded that the interplay between academically challenging environments and passionate leadership qualities reinforces effective teaching and learning, demonstrating that improvements in one domain positively influence the other, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students.

3. 4. Significant Influence of the Domains of Classroom Structuring on Teaching Allegories in Public Secondary Schools

Table 4. ***Significant Influence of the Domains of Classroom Structuring on Teaching Allegories in Public Secondary Schools***

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	56.400	1	57.600	94.144	0.003
Residual	501.265	129	12.6056		
Total	543.065	130			

Presented in Table 4 is the regression analysis showing the significant influence of the academically challenging environment on the passionate leadership qualities of public secondary school teachers. The computed F-value of 94.144 with a corresponding p-value of 0.003, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the academically challenging environment significantly influences the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

This finding suggests that teachers who experience a stronger academically challenging environment are more likely to exhibit

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higher levels of passionate leadership qualities. Specifically, factors such as effective instructional time, creativity, productivity, smooth transitions, and active student learning contribute to enhancing teachers' enthusiasm, communication, commitment, team building, and decisiveness. Overall, the result emphasizes that improving the academically challenging environment can positively impact the passionate leadership qualities of teachers, ultimately fostering more effective teaching practices and a motivating, student-centered learning atmosphere.

This finding underscores the significant influence of the academically challenging environment on the passionate leadership qualities of public secondary school teachers. In line with this, Andersen and Jensen (2021) reported that a well-developed academically challenging environment enhances teachers' ability to demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment, and effective decision-making in their leadership practices. Additionally, Müller (2022) emphasized that clear structures in instructional time, creativity, and productivity provide teachers with the framework needed to guide students effectively while fostering proactive leadership. Moreover, Rossi and Bianchi (2023) highlighted that smooth lesson transitions and active student learning, when implemented within challenging academic environments, strengthen teachers' communication, team-building, and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, Lefevre and Dubois (2020) noted that teachers working in rigorous academic settings are better able to balance instructional responsibilities with leadership tasks, promoting a collaborative and motivated school culture. Finally, Kovács and Szabó (2021) concluded that the elements of an academically challenging environment collectively influence passionate leadership qualities, demonstrating that improvements in the learning environment and teacher leadership mutually reinforce one another to support effective teaching and organizational growth.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings obtained in this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The level of the academically challenging environment in terms of instructional time, creativity, productivity, transitions, and student learning was described as high. This means that the academically challenging environment across these dimensions was highly manifested by the teachers. This signifies that teachers were creating a student-centered academic setting in which teaching and learning occurred at high levels, and students became more self-directed learners. Active engagement indicates that learners were directly involved in tasks that support cognition and intentional learning.

The level of passionate leadership qualities in terms of enthusiasm, communication, commitment, team building, and decisiveness was described as moderate. This means that these passionate leadership qualities were sometimes manifested by the teachers. This signifies that teachers were working toward transforming themselves and their schools to serve students with greater passion, concern, and commitment, moving beyond blame and uncertainty.

There was a significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools. This indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the higher the level of the academically challenging environment, the better the passionate leadership qualities of teachers.

There was also a significant influence of the academically challenging environment on the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools. This likewise indicates that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that improvements in the academically challenging environment correspond to enhanced passionate leadership qualities among teachers.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher formulated the following recommendations:

The Department of Education may establish strong collaborative efforts to prevent potential conflicts within their respective organizations. Appropriate strategies should be designed and implemented to address any existing or possible issues.

This study may serve as a basis for revising and improving DepEd procedures and guidelines to enhance the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools. It may also provide insights into the programs and activities necessary to motivate the hidden curriculum and foster diversity in educational leadership among teachers.

The results of this study may guide school administrators in planning and implementing programs that respond to the needs and aspirations of teachers. Such guidance could serve as a foundation for developing strategies and formulating policies that promote the academically challenging environment and strengthen the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

This study may assist educators and administrators in understanding the dynamics between the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers, allowing them to take informed actions for improvement.

Additionally, the study may contribute to improving teaching effectiveness and creating a trusting, creative, and motivating atmosphere that supports the achievement of organizational goals, particularly in enhancing the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public secondary schools.

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