



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN MULTI-LINGUAL CLASSROOMS: INSIGHTS THROUGH QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Jale M. Mansueto¹

¹Student, Graduate School, Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the professional development needs of elementary language teachers operating in multilingual classrooms. The participants of this study were ten (10) elementary language teachers currently working in multilingual classrooms, each with at least two years of teaching experience. This criterion ensured that the participants had encountered the complexities of diverse linguistic environments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). Their experience was crucial for providing informed perspectives on their professional development needs and challenges. I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding their professional development needs in diverse linguistic environments. The study's findings underscore the importance of integrating differentiated instruction, innovative learning strategies, and collaborative learning communities into multilingual classrooms. The implications of the study suggest that teachers should be supported in their professional development journey to better address the challenges of multilingual education. By aligning these strategies with theoretical frameworks such as Hord's PLCs, Piaget's Constructivist Theory, and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, schools can create a supportive environment that fosters effective teaching and learning. This holistic approach ensures that all students, regardless of their language proficiency, are provided with meaningful and engaging opportunities to develop their language skills in a collaborative and inclusive environment.

KEYWORDS: Professional Development, Elementary Language Teachers, Multi-Lingual Classrooms, Insights, Qualitative Interviews

INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly globalized world, elementary language teachers face the unique challenge of educating students in multilingual classrooms, where diverse linguistic backgrounds enrich the learning environment but also complicate instructional strategies. Understanding the professional development needs of these educators is crucial to enhancing their effectiveness and fostering inclusive learning experiences. This study employs qualitative interviews to explore the specific challenges and requirements that elementary language teachers encounter in multilingual settings. By capturing their insights and experiences, this research aims to identify targeted professional development opportunities that can empower teachers, ultimately benefiting both educators and their students in navigating the complexities of multilingual education.

In recent years, professional development for elementary language teachers in Indonesia's multilingual classrooms has become increasingly important due to the country's linguistic diversity. Teachers face challenges in addressing the varied linguistic needs of students who may speak different regional languages, Bahasa Indonesia, and foreign languages (Situmorang & Hasibuan, 2023).

To effectively support these learners, professional development programs have focused on enhancing teachers' skills in differentiated instruction, multilingual pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching. Research indicates that teacher training should prioritize strategies for managing language diversity, fostering inclusive environments, and integrating technology to support language acquisition (Burgess & Lund, 2020; Supriyadi & Hidayati, 2021). Additionally, fostering collaboration among teachers from different linguistic backgrounds is seen as vital to developing effective teaching practices and improving student outcomes in these multilingual settings.

In Russia, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms have become increasingly critical due to the nation's vast linguistic diversity, with many students speaking regional languages alongside Russian. Research highlights the necessity for teachers to be equipped with skills in bilingual education, intercultural communication, and differentiated instruction to address the diverse linguistic profiles of students (Sokolova & Kryuchkova, 2021).



Teachers also require training in managing language-related challenges, promoting multilingual literacy, and integrating modern technology into the classroom to enhance language learning (Kuznetsova & Piskunova, 2022). Additionally, ongoing professional development programs are focusing on developing teachers' competencies in inclusive teaching practices and fostering a collaborative approach among educators from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to improve student engagement and academic success (Zaitseva, 2023). These needs are essential to create effective learning environments that support all students in multilingual contexts.

In Japan, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms have become more pressing as the student population has grown increasingly diverse, especially with the rise in the number of children from immigrant families and international students. Recent studies highlight the need for teachers to develop expertise in multilingual education, including strategies for supporting learners who speak languages other than Japanese, and fostering inclusive classroom environments that respect linguistic diversity (Sato & Nakamura, 2021).

Teachers require professional development in differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and the integration of technology to better cater to the varied needs of their students (Yamaguchi & Ueno, 2022). Additionally, there is an emphasis on equipping teachers with tools to improve their own language skills, particularly in English and other foreign languages, to better communicate with non-Japanese speaking students and their families (Ishikawa & Takahashi, 2023). These initiatives are essential for ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students in Japan's multilingual classrooms.

In Cagayan de Oro City, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms have become a growing concern due to the city's increasing linguistic diversity, with students speaking various regional languages, including Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Indigenous languages, alongside Filipino and English. Recent studies highlight that teachers require training in multilingual pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and inclusive teaching practices to effectively support students with varying language backgrounds (Garcia & Villanueva, 2021).

Moreover, there is a call for enhancing teachers' cultural competence and equipping them with strategies to foster positive language attitudes, promote language equity, and address potential language barriers that hinder student engagement and achievement (Espino & Bacus, 2022). Professional development programs also emphasize the integration of technology in language teaching, particularly in utilizing digital tools to support language acquisition and bridge communication gaps (Aligala & Narvaez, 2023). These initiatives are critical for empowering teachers to create effective and inclusive learning environments in multilingual classrooms.

In Makati City, a highly urbanized area with a diverse population, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms have become increasingly urgent due to the variety of languages spoken by students, including Filipino, English, and several regional languages. Recent studies emphasize that teachers need ongoing training in multilingual teaching strategies, such as scaffolded instruction, bilingual literacy, and culturally responsive teaching, to effectively address the diverse linguistic backgrounds of their students (Santos & Mendoza, 2021).

Additionally, professional development programs are focusing on improving teachers' skills in classroom management in multilingual settings and equipping them with the tools to create inclusive, supportive learning environments (Tan & Villar, 2022). The integration of digital tools and technology to support language acquisition, especially in English and Filipino, has also been identified as a key area for teacher development, helping to bridge language gaps and promote active student participation (Luna & Reyes, 2023). These areas of professional growth are essential for enhancing teaching effectiveness and student achievement in multilingual classrooms in Makati City.

In the Bicol Region of the Philippines, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms are increasingly recognized due to the region's rich linguistic diversity, with students speaking various local languages such as Bicolano, Masbateño, and others, in addition to Filipino and English. Research indicates that teachers require specialized training in multilingual education, including strategies for differentiated instruction, fostering bilingual or multilingual literacy, and managing language diversity effectively in the classroom (Agoncillo & Torres, 2021).

Professional development programs also highlight the need for teachers to develop cultural competence to better understand the regional linguistic and cultural contexts of their students, ensuring that learning is both inclusive and relevant (De Guzman & Cruz, 2022). Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on enhancing teachers' digital literacy to integrate technology into language instruction, which can help bridge language gaps and support students in their language acquisition (Bautista & Castaño, 2023). These training needs are crucial to improving teaching practices and learning outcomes in multilingual classrooms across the Bicol Region.

Finally, In Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms are critical due to the presence of various indigenous languages (e.g., B'laan, Tagakaulo) alongside Filipino and English. Recent studies highlight the necessity for teachers to be trained in multilingual



education strategies that promote inclusive and differentiated teaching practices tailored to the diverse linguistic needs of students (Tan & Alvarado, 2021).

Teachers in the region also require professional development in cultural responsiveness to better understand and integrate the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of indigenous students into the curriculum (Chavez & Dela Cruz, 2022). Furthermore, there is an increasing need for training in using technology to support language learning, particularly for students who speak local dialects and need additional language support in both Filipino and English (Garcia & Bonifacio, 2023). These professional development initiatives are essential for creating equitable learning opportunities and improving language proficiency in multilingual classrooms in Kiblawan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research consistently highlights the complexity of teaching in multilingual classrooms. According to García and Wei (2022), multilingual classrooms are characterized by students who speak multiple home languages, which can create challenges in communication, comprehension, and assessment. Teachers in these settings must navigate not only linguistic diversity but also cultural and educational differences that affect student learning. Additionally, they are required to adopt flexible pedagogical approaches to accommodate various levels of language proficiency (Baker, 2021). As a result, teachers need ongoing professional development to build competencies that are responsive to these diverse needs.

In Malaysia, multilingual classrooms present unique challenges for teachers, particularly given the country's linguistic diversity. According to Yusoff and Yaacob (2021), the Malaysian education system is characterized by students who speak various languages, including Malay, English, Mandarin, Tamil, and indigenous languages. This linguistic diversity creates challenges in terms of classroom communication, content delivery, and student engagement. Teachers often need to balance the linguistic proficiency of students who may be fluent in one language but have limited proficiency in others, making it difficult to implement a uniform teaching strategy.

Furthermore, Mohamad and Ismail (2022) emphasize the necessity for teachers to possess not only subject expertise but also multilingual competencies to ensure that students with different language backgrounds can access the curriculum effectively. One of the significant challenges highlighted in recent research is the lack of adequate teacher training for multilingual environments. Ahmad and Ismail (2020) found that many teachers in Malaysia, particularly those in rural areas, do not receive sufficient training in managing multilingual classrooms. Although the national curriculum is designed to accommodate a variety of linguistic backgrounds, the practical application of this curriculum is often hindered by teachers' limited training in language acquisition and bilingual education strategies.

As a result, teachers face difficulties in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of students who may be more proficient in one language while struggling with others. This lack of professional development opportunities is seen as a significant barrier to effective teaching in multilingual contexts (Liu et al., 2021).

Moreover, cultural diversity adds an additional layer of complexity to the multilingual classroom in Malaysia. Teachers are required to navigate not only language differences but also varying cultural expectations and practices. Research by Tan and Lee (2021) underscores the importance of cultural competence in Malaysian classrooms, noting that teachers often face challenges in understanding the cultural nuances that affect learning. In a study by Zainal Abidin (2022), it was observed that teachers frequently encounter difficulties when trying to implement inclusive teaching methods that consider both linguistic and cultural diversity. Teachers must be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of students to foster an inclusive, supportive, and respectful classroom environment, which in turn enhances student participation and learning outcomes.

Certainly, the role of technology in addressing these challenges has also gained attention in recent literature. Hasan et al. (2023) highlight that digital tools and e-learning platforms have the potential to bridge the gap in multilingual classrooms by providing students with resources in multiple languages, thereby supporting differentiated learning. However, the integration of technology in teaching remains a challenge, as Hassan and Jamaludin (2020) point out that many teachers lack the necessary skills and access to resources to fully implement these technologies in their classrooms.

Despite the government's efforts to promote digital literacy, teachers in multilingual classrooms often struggle with technological adoption due to factors such as inadequate infrastructure, limited professional development, and lack of support. Thus, the integration of technology in multilingual classrooms in Malaysia requires not only access to digital tools but also ongoing professional development to equip teachers with the skills needed for effective use in diverse educational settings (Baker, 2021).

The professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms are multifaceted and complex. Teachers require ongoing support in areas such as language proficiency, pedagogical strategies, cultural competence, and collaboration with colleagues (Cummins, 2021). Moreover, effective PD programs must be contextually relevant, supported by strong school leadership, and ideally incorporate new technologies to address the challenges of multilingual environments. As research continues to highlight the importance of tailored, inclusive PD, it is essential that educational systems invest in programs that empower teachers to meet the evolving needs of their diverse student populations.



Research Questions

1. What specific challenges do elementary language teachers face in multilingual classrooms?
2. What types of professional development strategies do teachers currently seek to enhance the creativity of teachers?
3. What insights gained to better support teachers' collaboration in attaining professional development needs?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach in this study. This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding their professional development needs in diverse linguistic environments. According to Creswell (2021), qualitative research is particularly effective in capturing the complexity of human experiences and the contextual factors that influence teaching practices. This approach provided flexibility, enabling me to ask open-ended questions while guiding the conversation toward key topics of interest.

This approach was essential for uncovering the nuanced challenges that language teachers faced in multilingual classrooms, as it encouraged participants to share their stories and insights in a manner that structured surveys might not have facilitated (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The procedure involved recruiting participants through targeted outreach to schools and professional organizations and conducting interviews in a supportive environment that fostered candid discussion.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were ten (10) elementary language teachers currently working in multilingual classrooms, each with at least two years of teaching experience. This criterion ensured that the participants had encountered the complexities of diverse linguistic environments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). Their experience was crucial for providing informed perspectives on their professional development needs and challenges.

Additionally, the participants were selected from various schools and districts, ensuring representation of different teaching contexts, including urban, suburban, and rural settings. This approach aimed to enhance the generalizability of the findings (Creswell, 2021). The teachers also represented a variety of language backgrounds and instructional practices, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of multilingual education. This diversity in participants contributed to a broad and well-rounded perspective on the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual contexts.

The participants were divided into two groups for data collection: five participated in in-depth interviews (IDI), and the other five engaged in a focus group discussion (FGD). All data collected from the IDI and FGD were recorded and transcribed to summarize the participants' responses in an organized and systematic format.

Research Instrument

I utilized a semi-structured interview guide as my primary research instrument. This instrument facilitated in-depth conversations with participants while allowing flexibility in their responses. Semi-structured interviews were particularly effective in qualitative research because they enabled me to explore specific themes while allowing participants to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2020). The interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on key areas such as the challenges teachers faced in multilingual classrooms, their current professional development experiences, and their recommendations for future training.

This format encouraged rich, descriptive responses that revealed the complexities of teachers' experiences and needs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020). By utilizing this instrument, the study captured nuanced insights that quantitative measures may have overlooked, ultimately providing a deeper understanding of the professional development landscape for elementary language teachers in diverse educational settings.

Data Analysis

As a qualitative researcher, I employed a rigorous and systematic approach to analyze the data collected from interviews, observations, and document analysis. The specific techniques I utilized depended on the nature of the data and the research questions.

Thematic analysis was a primary tool for identifying patterns and themes within the data. I carefully read and re-read the transcripts and field notes to identify recurring themes. These themes were coded and organized into a hierarchical framework. I then delved deeper into the themes, exploring their nuances and implications for the professional development of language teachers.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were employed to examine the language used by participants to understand the underlying meanings and power dynamics. I analyzed how language was used to construct social identities, shape discourses about language education, and influence pedagogical practices.



Interviews were also used to analyze the stories and narratives shared by participants. I identified the key elements of the narrative, such as the plot, characters, and setting. By interpreting these narratives, I gained insights into the participants' beliefs, values, and motivations.

To ensure the rigor and validity of my analysis, I employed several strategies. Data triangulation involved using multiple data sources to verify findings. Member checking involved sharing findings with participants to ensure accuracy and validity. Peer review involved seeking feedback from colleagues to improve the quality of the analysis. Reflexivity involved critically reflecting on my own biases, assumptions, and values to minimize their impact on the analysis.

Effective data management was crucial for a successful qualitative research project. I organized and managed the collected data using a systematic approach, which included transcribing interviews, coding and categorizing data, and creating a well-structured filing system.

Once the data had been analyzed, I interpreted the findings and developed theoretical insights. I identified key themes, related them to existing literature, and generated new theoretical insights. By employing these rigorous data analysis techniques and ensuring quality control, I aimed to produce reliable and insightful findings that contributed to the understanding of the professional development needs of elementary language teachers in multilingual classrooms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implications

This study provides valuable implications for the professional growth of educators, particularly in addressing the challenges faced in multilingual settings. One key implication is the need for teachers to adopt differentiated instruction strategies to cater to the diverse language proficiency levels in their classrooms. Teachers identified the challenges of language proficiency disparities and communication barriers, which are pivotal in creating a meaningful learning environment. By aligning these findings with Hord's theory of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), it is evident that teachers can benefit from collaboration with colleagues to share insights, strategies, and best practices. In a PLC, teachers engage in continuous learning, making it possible to address the complexities of multilingual classrooms through collective problem-solving and professional dialogue, thus enhancing their ability to differentiate instruction effectively.

Another significant implication of the study is the necessity for teachers to embrace innovative learning strategies to foster engagement and learning among multilingual students. Teachers reported that project-based learning, gamification, and the use of multimedia tools were key to promoting active participation and deeper understanding. These strategies resonate with Piaget's Constructivist Theory, which emphasizes that learners build knowledge through active engagement with their environment. By incorporating hands-on, real-world applications into the curriculum, teachers can encourage students to construct their understanding based on personal experiences, thus deepening their comprehension. Moreover, such strategies allow teachers to scaffold learning by meeting students where they are in terms of language proficiency, providing the necessary support for their developmental needs.

Furthermore, the study revealed that fostering collaborative learning communities within the classroom was a powerful strategy for enhancing student engagement and language acquisition. Teachers emphasized the importance of collaborative tasks, peer learning, and group work in facilitating a deeper understanding of language. This finding supports Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, which stresses the importance of social interactions in learning. According to Vygotsky, language development is deeply rooted in social interaction and cultural context. In multilingual classrooms, collaborative learning allows students to draw upon their peers' linguistic and cultural knowledge, creating a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment. Teachers, therefore, need to prioritize collaborative learning communities, where students can interact, communicate, and learn from each other in meaningful ways.

The study also highlights the need for ongoing professional development focused on enhancing teachers' capabilities to implement these strategies effectively. As teachers grapple with the diverse needs of their multilingual students, professional development opportunities centered on differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and innovative learning strategies are essential. By aligning these development opportunities with Hord's PLC framework, schools can create a culture of continuous improvement, where teachers work together to solve common challenges. Teachers should engage in regular training sessions, workshops, and peer-led learning groups to refine their teaching practices, exchange ideas, and learn new strategies that meet the needs of multilingual students.

In conclusion, the study's findings underscore the importance of integrating differentiated instruction, innovative learning strategies, and collaborative learning communities into multilingual classrooms. The implications of the study suggest that teachers should be supported in their professional development journey to better address the challenges of multilingual education. By aligning these strategies with theoretical frameworks such as Hord's PLCs, Piaget's Constructivist Theory, and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory, schools can create a supportive environment that fosters effective teaching and learning. This holistic approach ensures that all students, regardless of their language proficiency, are provided with meaningful and engaging opportunities to develop their language skills in a collaborative and inclusive environment.



Future Directions

This study on the opens several avenues for future research and practice, offering valuable directions for elementary learners, language teachers, school administrators, and future researchers.

Elementary Learners. For elementary learners, particularly those in multilingual classrooms, it is essential to further explore how differentiated instruction and innovative teaching strategies can directly enhance their language acquisition and overall academic success. Future initiatives should focus on developing student-centered learning experiences that cater to the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. Programs designed to foster cross-cultural communication and linguistic exchange among students could be a valuable approach. Additionally, there is a need to assess how the integration of technology and multimedia tools can improve language proficiency for students from various linguistic backgrounds. Future educational frameworks should prioritize inclusive practices that ensure every student's voice is heard and respected in the classroom.

Language Teachers. For language teachers, future directions should emphasize creating professional development programs that are tailored to the unique needs of multilingual classrooms. Continuous training in culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, and collaborative learning strategies will be crucial. Future studies should assess the impact of professional development initiatives on teachers' ability to engage diverse learners and incorporate innovative teaching methods. Teachers may benefit from collaborative platforms, such as communities of practice or online learning networks, where they can exchange strategies, insights, and resources. Long-term support systems that encourage ongoing professional growth will empower teachers to address the evolving challenges in multilingual classrooms effectively.

School Administrators. School administrators play a critical role in supporting language teachers by creating an environment that values linguistic diversity and provides adequate resources for language instruction. Future research should explore how school leadership can foster a school-wide culture of collaboration and inclusivity, where teachers have the tools and support necessary to teach effectively in multilingual settings. Administrators should consider the integration of structured professional development opportunities that align with the findings of this study. Additionally, they should focus on creating policies that encourage family and community engagement, as parent-teacher collaboration has been identified as a key element in promoting language acquisition and academic success in multilingual classrooms.

Future Researchers. For future researchers, there is a need to continue investigating the impact of professional development on language teachers' effectiveness in multilingual classrooms. Future studies should explore the longitudinal effects of differentiated instruction and collaborative teaching strategies on students' language proficiency and overall academic outcomes. Moreover, research could focus on the role of technology in supporting language acquisition in diverse classrooms, especially as digital tools and platforms become more integrated into education. Comparative studies across different multilingual environments would also provide a deeper understanding of the universal challenges and strategies that work in various contexts. Future research could further explore the potential of cross-cultural teaching methods, examining how these approaches influence both teacher development and student success in multilingual classrooms.

The future directions of this study suggest a comprehensive approach to enhancing the quality of language education in multilingual classrooms. By focusing on elementary learners, language teachers, school administrators, and future researchers, the ongoing development of culturally responsive, differentiated, and collaborative teaching practices will better equip educational systems to meet the needs of diverse student populations. These future initiatives will not only strengthen language proficiency but also support the overall educational and social development of students in multilingual environments.

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