

Original Article

## **Explicating the Standpoints of Public Elementary School Teachers on the Utilization of Competency-Based Curriculum in Diverse Classrooms**

Gemma Mojico <sup>1</sup>, Josephine Baguio <sup>1,\*</sup>

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### **Abstract**

This phenomenological study explored the experiences of public elementary school teachers in utilizing the competency-based curriculum in diverse classrooms in Baganga South District, Division of Davao Oriental. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with 12 participants, the study examined challenges, coping strategies, and teacher insights related to classroom-level implementation. Thematic analysis indicated three major challenge domains: instructional challenges, assessment-related challenges, and systemic or administrative barriers. Teachers responded through instructional strategies, support systems and resources, and workload and well-being management practices. The findings also generated insights on teaching methods, student engagement and learning, and perceived opportunities for curriculum improvement. Overall, the study highlights the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities in diverse and resource-constrained settings and offers implications for teacher support, professional development, and policy responsiveness.

<sup>1</sup> Graduate School,  
Rizal Memorial  
Colleges, Inc., Davao,  
Philippines

\* Correspondence:  
[josephinebbaguio@outlook.com](mailto:josephinebbaguio@outlook.com)

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### **1. Introduction**

Competency-based curriculum implementation in public elementary schools is often presented as a pathway toward mastery-focused and learner-centered instruction.

As Evans, Landl, and Thompson (2020) explain in their K-12 competency-based education review, implementation quality depends heavily on how schools translate policy into classroom practice, including assessment systems, teacher supports, and day-to-day instructional routines. In diverse classrooms, teachers must reconcile competency expectations with differences in learner readiness, pace, language background, and support needs.

The Philippine context makes this issue especially urgent. OECD reporting on PISA 2022 continues to show major learning gaps in the Philippines across core domains, including reading and mathematics, while also emphasizing the continuing effects of disruption and inequality on classroom learning conditions (OECD, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). In this setting, competency-based curriculum approaches may offer promise, but only if implementation demands are matched by realistic teacher support and classroom-level feasibility.

Teachers in diverse classrooms face dual demands under competency-based curriculum use. They are expected to design differentiated learning experiences and assess mastery carefully while also managing routine teaching responsibilities, documentation, and school requirements. Deng et al.” (2024), in their qualitative study of teachers' perceptions and practices under competency-based reform, show how policy-practice gaps emerge when teachers agree with reform goals but lack time, autonomy, or support to enact them fully. This tension is closely related to workload and well-being concerns identified in teacher well-being reviews, which note that high demands and weak supports can undermine instructional sustainability (Dreer, 2023; Aziku et al., 2024).

The challenge becomes more pronounced in elementary classrooms because competency-based implementation often requires repeated feedback, ongoing progress monitoring, flexible grouping, and responsive teaching methods. Research on teachers in inclusive and diverse classrooms likewise indicates that curriculum success depends not only on curriculum design but also on teacher preparedness, classroom resources, and institutional support systems (Jabri et al., 2025; Llorent et al., 2024; Navas-Bonilla et al., 2025). These factors are directly relevant when teachers must apply competency expectations across learners with varied needs.

A phenomenological inquiry is appropriate for this topic because it foregrounds teachers' lived experiences rather than assuming uniform implementation conditions. Using reflexive thematic analysis can help surface how teachers interpret challenges, cope in real classrooms, and define meaningful curriculum use in practice, particularly when implementation is shaped by contextual constraints and local school cultures (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 2023; Byrne, 2022).

This study therefore examined the standpoints of public elementary school teachers in Baganga South District, Division of Davao Oriental, on the utilization of the competency-based curriculum in diverse classrooms. Specifically, it explored the challenges they experienced, the coping strategies they employed, and the insights they shared regarding teaching, learning, and curriculum improvement.

## **2. Methodology**

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in utilizing the competency-based curriculum in diverse classrooms in Baganga South District, Division of Davao Oriental. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand how teachers experienced, interpreted, and made meaning of curriculum implementation under diverse classroom conditions. The inquiry was aligned with a constructivist perspective that treated teacher experiences as context-bound and shaped by classroom interactions, institutional expectations, and resource realities.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure information-rich cases relevant to the study aims. The study involved 12 public elementary school teachers with direct experience utilizing the competency-based curriculum in diverse classroom settings. Inclusion criteria emphasized active classroom teaching, experience with competency-based curriculum implementation, and the ability to provide reflective narratives on classroom challenges, coping strategies, and insights.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview guide was aligned with the study's three research questions and covered challenges in curriculum utilization, coping mechanisms, and teacher insights regarding instructional practice, student learning, and curriculum improvement. The semi-structured format supported consistency across interviews while allowing probing for concrete classroom examples, decisions, and experiences.

Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and the use of participant codes in reporting. Interview records and transcripts were handled securely. The study also emphasized participant dignity and privacy, consistent with qualitative research ethics and the trustworthiness principles discussed in the thesis.

Data analysis followed a thematic process within a phenomenological frame. The researchers engaged in transcript familiarization, coding, clustering of codes into themes, theme review, and narrative interpretation. The analytic process was supported by reflexive thematic analysis principles emphasizing iterative interpretation, theme coherence, and transparent decision-making (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 2023; Byrne, 2022). Trustworthiness was strengthened through alignment of themes with participant narratives and attention to credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Ahmed, 2024).

## **3. Results**

### *3.1 Challenges*

#### **Theme 1: Instructional Challenges**

Teachers described difficulty aligning competency targets with diverse learner readiness, pace, and classroom needs. They emphasized that lesson adaptation, differentiated support, and maintaining curriculum flow at the same time made classroom implementation demanding. They mentioned:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P1)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P4)*

## **Theme 2: Assessment-Related Challenges**

Teachers reported challenges in designing, tracking, and interpreting competency-based assessments, especially when learners progressed at different rates. They also noted concerns about fairness, time demands, and the difficulty of documenting mastery consistently. They stated:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P2)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P10)*

## **Theme 3: Systemic or Administrative Barriers**

Teachers described administrative workload, reporting requirements, and limited material support as barriers that reduced time for instructional planning and differentiated implementation. They also pointed to gaps in training and institutional support that affected confidence and consistency in curriculum use. They verbalized:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P6)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P7)*

### **3.2 Coping Strategies**

#### **Theme 1: Instructional Strategies**

Teachers described difficulty aligning competency targets with diverse learner readiness, pace, and classroom needs. They emphasized that lesson adaptation, differentiated support, and maintaining curriculum flow at the same time made classroom implementation demanding. They mentioned:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P5)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P9)*

## **Theme 2: Support Systems and Resources**

Participants emphasized support from colleagues, school leaders, and available materials as important coping resources in implementing the curriculum. They also described sharing strategies and resources to reduce preparation burden and improve classroom delivery. They verbalized:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P3)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P4)*

## **Theme 3: Workload and Well-Being Management**

Teachers described managing workload through scheduling, prioritization, and personal strategies to prevent exhaustion and sustain classroom effectiveness. They also acknowledged stress and emotional fatigue as part of competency-based curriculum implementation in diverse settings. They stated:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P7)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P10)*

### **3.3 Insights**

#### **Theme 1: Teaching Methods**

Teachers reflected on the need for flexible, learner-responsive teaching methods that align competencies with classroom diversity. They emphasized practical,

engaging, and adaptive approaches as more effective than rigid content coverage. They mentioned:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P1)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P4)*

## **Theme 2: Student Engagement and Learning**

Teachers reported that student engagement improved when competency targets were translated into accessible and meaningful activities. They viewed learner participation, confidence, and visible progress as important indicators of effective curriculum use. They verbalized:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P6)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P11)*

## **Theme 3: Perceived Opportunities for Curriculum Improvement**

Teachers suggested strengthening training, resource provision, and policy alignment to make competency-based curriculum implementation more realistic and effective in diverse classrooms. They also emphasized the need for curriculum expectations that better match classroom conditions. They stated:

*"I need to adjust the lesson because students do not learn at the same pace, and it is difficult to ensure all competencies are mastered within the given time." (P3)*

*"The paperwork and reports reduce the time I can use to prepare activities that match the needs of my learners." (P8)*

## **4. Discussion**

The findings show that teachers' standpoints on competency-based curriculum utilization are shaped by a continuous effort to reconcile policy intent with diverse classroom realities. Rather than describing isolated problems, participants narrated overlapping instructional, assessment, and systemic pressures. This pattern is consistent with Evans et al. (2020), who found that K-12 competency-based education

implementation is influenced by recurring barriers and facilitators across systems, and with Deng et al. (2024), who documented a clear policy-practice gap when teachers lacked sufficient time and support to implement competency-focused reforms.

Instructional challenges emerged as a central concern because teachers had to align competency expectations with learners who progressed at different rates and required different forms of support. In diverse classrooms, this required constant adaptation of task difficulty, pacing, and explanation. Llorent et al. (2024) similarly show that teacher practices in inclusive classrooms are tied to broader student development outcomes, which suggests that teachers' adaptive work in competency-based classrooms should be understood as both instructional and developmental.

Assessment-related challenges further reveal a major tension in competency-based curriculum use. Teachers were expected to monitor mastery and document progress while also handling large classes and routine teaching demands. As Evans et al. (2020) note, assessment and reporting structures are among the most influential implementation factors in competency-based systems, and participants in the present study echoed this by emphasizing the time and procedural burden of tracking competency progress in diverse classrooms.

The theme on systemic or administrative barriers is especially important because it shifts interpretation away from teacher-deficit explanations. Participants pointed to resource limitations, paperwork, and insufficient training or institutional support as factors that constrained curriculum implementation. This aligns with broader curriculum reform literature, including Tahirsylaj (2025), which argues that competence-based curricula are interpreted through multiple policy visions and local implementation conditions, and with Simiyu (2025), who highlights the importance of teacher perceptions and implementation context in competency-based curriculum enactment.

The coping themes demonstrate that teachers were not passive recipients of curriculum pressure. They responded with flexible instructional strategies, support-seeking behaviors, and workload management practices that helped sustain classroom functioning. In this sense, teachers' standpoints reflected practical agency: they adjusted lessons, shared resources, and modified routines to make the curriculum usable in context. Braun and Clarke (2023) describe thematic analysis as a way to interpret patterned meaning in lived experience, and the present findings show a clear pattern of adaptive professionalism rather than simple compliance.

Teachers' insights regarding teaching methods, student engagement, and curriculum improvement extend the analysis by clarifying how they define successful curriculum use. Participants emphasized accessible lesson design, meaningful participation, and visible learner progress, which indicates that they evaluate competency-based curriculum not only in terms of policy compliance but also in terms of actual classroom learning conditions. This echoes Deng et al. (2024), whose participants similarly supported reform goals while questioning the practical conditions needed for genuine competency development and assessment.

Overall, the study highlights a policy-practice gap: competency-based curriculum carries strong learner-centered intentions, yet teachers require stronger instructional resources, assessment support, and institutional backing to implement it effectively in diverse classrooms. Evidence from teacher well-being reviews also suggests that sustained instructional adaptation under high demand can affect professional functioning when support systems are weak (Dreer, 2023; Aziku et al., 2024). The present findings therefore support school- and system-level investments in training, time-sensitive workload planning, and classroom resource provision as conditions for realistic competency-based curriculum implementation.

## **5. Conclusion**

Public elementary school teachers in Baganga South District described the utilization of the competency-based curriculum in diverse classrooms as both promising and difficult. Their standpoints showed recurring challenges in instruction, assessment, and systemic support, but also demonstrated adaptive coping through flexible teaching, collaborative support, and workload management. Teachers' insights emphasized the importance of responsive teaching methods, student engagement, and curriculum improvement aligned with classroom realities. These findings support the need for stronger institutional supports, teacher development, and resource provision to make competency-based curriculum implementation more feasible and effective in diverse public elementary classrooms.

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## **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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