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## **Professionalism and Classroom Learning Environment of Public Elementary Schools in Tagum City Division**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.0624.1440>

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### **ABSTRACT**

Creating a positive classroom learning environment is a fundamental aspect of teachers' responsibilities, reflecting their dedication to professionalism. Professionalism is believed to be instrumental in fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. However, this aspect has not been thoroughly explored, particularly in the local context. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the level of professionalism and the classroom learning environment among public elementary school teachers in Tagum City Division, as well as to investigate any correlation between these variables. Through probability sampling, 200 elementary teachers from public schools were selected as participants. Employing a descriptive-correlational survey methodology, the collected data were analyzed using Mean and Product-Moment correlation techniques. The findings revealed a significant degree of professionalism among teachers and a positive classroom learning environment. Moreover, a notable relationship between these variables was identified. Based on these results, it is recommended that officials within the Department of Education explore avenues to support teachers in fostering a positive classroom learning environment by emphasizing the importance of professionalism and commitment.

Keywords: Professionalism, classroom learning environment, descriptive correlation, Tagum City Division, Philippines

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### **Introduction**

When students understand and can meet expectations, they experience comfort, confidence, and success in their learning journey. These expectations, coupled with established classroom routines, procedures, and organization, foster a positive learning environment that enhances students' learning capabilities and overall success. In recent times, schools and educators have encountered a growing prevalence of social and emotional needs among students, alongside challenging behaviors. These individual concerns pose obstacles to students as they navigate the development of their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Collectively, these challenges within the classroom have the potential to disrupt the learning process. Consequently, managing classroom challenges emerges as a significant issue for educators, requiring them to demonstrate resilience and bravery in overcoming these obstacles (Hill, 2022).

Teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe and supportive classroom environment that encourages active participation and engagement among all students. However, many educators face persistent challenges in maintaining an optimal classroom environment. In the United States, educators encounter various barriers to effective teaching and learning, including threats to their emotional and physical well-being, limited influence over school policies and instructional methods, and feelings of dissatisfaction and low motivation. Poor classroom learning environments often manifest in issues such as student tardiness and absenteeism, disengagement, poor student health, and inadequate student preparedness for instruction (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

In the Philippines, every June marks the beginning of a new school year for over 21 million elementary and high school students. Unfortunately, nearly 4 million of these students, comprising 18 percent of the total student population, find themselves attending severely overcrowded public schools. Particularly in urban areas, some classrooms accommodate upwards of 100 students, far exceeding the Department of Education's (DepEd) recommended limit of 45 students per class. Research indicates that overcrowded classrooms not only hinder students' ability to focus on their studies but also restrict teachers' opportunities to employ innovative teaching methods such as cooperative learning and group work. Additionally, teachers in congested classrooms often experience heightened levels of stress and burnout, leading to strained relationships with their students (Jones, 2017).

In the Division of Tagum City, teachers faced significant challenges in classroom management due to poor learning environments. Observations revealed that teachers contend with overcrowded classrooms, inadequate ventilation, limited resources, and disruptive student behavior as part of their daily routine. These conditions impose constraints on teachers, preventing them from delivering their best performance. However, these observations have yet to be formally investigated.

The scarcity of research examining classroom learning environments, particularly concerning teachers' professionalism, spurred the researcher to delve into these variables. This study shed light on these issues and provide valuable insights for policymakers to develop policies, programs, interventions, projects, and activities aimed at improving the classroom learning environment in public schools, taking into account teachers' professionalism.

This study was primarily grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) as proposed by Bandura (1977). According to SLT, learning and the acquisition of individual knowledge are primarily facilitated through observation (Bandura, 1977). SLT suggests a complex cognitive process involving the observation of behaviors and the subsequent development of new behaviors, although this does not necessarily entail direct imitation of observed behaviors. Observational learning has been recognized as a significant mechanism in teacher development (Lortie, 2002), highlighting the importance of mental models or conceptualizations of lessons as teachers enter the classroom (Rowlands, Thwaites, & Jared, 2011). The choices and development of behaviors by teachers are influenced by their beliefs regarding the likelihood of success with a particular course of action in a given context.

Within SLT, this process of self-regulation is termed as self-efficacy, which denotes an individual's belief in their ability to succeed when acting in specific ways within particular contexts. Self-efficacy encompasses cognitive abilities, underlying skills, as well as affective components like confidence, motivation, and willingness to innovate (Bandura, 1997). Prior studies have indicated a relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and positive teaching behaviors and student outcomes. Teachers with lower levels of self-efficacy tend to hold pessimistic views regarding student motivation, often relying on strict classroom management and external incentives to motivate students (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990). While self-efficacy is a crucial dimension, this study considers the broader theoretical framework of SLT.

Observational learning and the mental modeling of observed behaviors are central to SLT. Teachers engage in the (re)construction of behaviors to be implemented in the classroom. According to Bandura (1977, 1997), much of this behavior becomes routine over time, requiring minimal prior modeling and planning. Novice teachers typically observe and model the practices of experienced educators, adapting and reproducing them in their own classrooms, a process consistent with SLT (Lortie, 2002). Feedback, response, and self-assessment further influence the development of teaching behaviors (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Over time, these practices become largely habitual (Bandura, 1997; Cuban, 2009; Wake, 2011).

At a theoretical level, SLT seems to provide a valuable framework for elucidating professional learning, demonstrating strong descriptive capabilities based on the above discussion. To further explore its explanatory potential, a study on professional development was conducted. Three key components were identified from SLT through iterative data analysis: teacher knowledge, teacher self-efficacy beliefs, and social, contextual, and environmental effects.

Teacher knowledge pertains to instances where educators discuss their understanding and its impact within the context of professional development (PD) and teaching. Within SLT, knowledge is viewed as mental models of potential behaviors, suggesting the presence of observational learning and behavior modeling if SLT proves to be a viable descriptive and explanatory framework. Regarding teacher self-efficacy beliefs, examples may involve direct mentions of confidence, motivation, or indications of openness to incorporating innovative practices in their teaching. Conversely, negative effects on self-efficacy might also be observed. Social, contextual, and environmental effects encompass aspects of PD and teachers' experiences that relate to student, parent, or colleague expectations, which could influence their classroom practices. These factors may shape the teacher's behavior and decisions within the instructional setting.

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## Methodology

### *Research Design*

This study employed a quantitative research approach, specifically utilizing the descriptive correlational method. Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize findings. In contrast, qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data analysis. A descriptive correlational study aims to describe relationships between variables without establishing causality (Bhandari, 2022). In this research, a quantitative approach was chosen as statistical figures were utilized for data analysis and interpretation. The study was descriptive in nature as it sought to assess the extent of professionalism among teachers and the classroom learning environment. Additionally, it was correlational, aiming to gauge the relationship between teacher professionalism and the classroom learning environment in public elementary schools within the Division of Tagum City.

### *Research Respondents*

This study focused on 200 public elementary teachers within the Division of Tagum City. It was determined that a sample size of 200 was adequate for conducting Pearson Correlation analysis, as suggested by Memon et al. (2020). Therefore, the inclusion criteria involved selecting elementary teachers with a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience in the public sector. This duration was deemed sufficient for teachers to evaluate their level of professionalism and the classroom learning environment. Participants who felt uncomfortable or hesitant about completing the survey questionnaire were given the option to withdraw from the study voluntarily. They were under no obligation to participate, and their decision to withdraw was respected. The well-being and comfort of the respondents were prioritized throughout the research process.

### *Research Instruments*

In collecting data, this study utilized an adapted survey questionnaire. The questionnaire that was employed in this undertaking was divided into two sets. The first set was focusing on professionalism while the second set was about classroom learning environment.

The professionalism questionnaire was adapted from the study of Hassan and Musa (2020). The instrument consists of 51 items. It has the following indicators, namely: teachers' characters (1-15); commitment to change continual improvement (1-11); subject and pedagogical knowledge (1-13); and

obligations and working relationships beyond the classroom (1-12). The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot testing having a result of .81 suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency.

The classroom learning environment questionnaire was a modified form of survey adapted McGhee et al. (2003). It was also subjected to pilot testing which revealed a result of .84, suggesting that the items have relatively *high* internal consistency. The tool has a total of 15 items. It has three variables, namely: positive classroom (1-5), diversity values (1-5), and persistence (1-5).

The instrument in this study was contextualized to achieve the purpose of this study. The researcher integrated all the comments and suggestions of the adviser, panel members and expert validators for the refinement of the tools and to achieve construct validity.

## Table

**Table 1**

### Summary on the Extent of Professionalism of Teachers

No	Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1	Teachers' Characters	3.53	Extensive
2	Commitment to Change and Continual Improvement	3.52	Extensive
3	Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge	4.49	Very Extensive
4	Obligation and Working Relationships Beyond the Classroom	3.51	Extensive
<b>Overall</b>		<b>3.76</b>	<b>Extensive</b>

Table 1 provides the summary on the extent of professionalism of teachers. It is exhibited that the overall mean of professionalism of teachers is 3.76, which is in an extensive level. This means that professionalism of teachers is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all four (4) indicators reveal a varying result ranging from extensive to very extensive level. As arranged chronologically, subject and pedagogical knowledge has the highest mean score (4.49). This is followed by teachers' characters (3.53), commitment to change and continual improvement (3.52), and obligation and working relationships beyond the classroom (3.51).

The extensive professionalism demonstrated by teachers reaffirms the prevailing view emphasized by Hassan and Musa (2020), which underscores that teacher professionalism sets a standard for teachers to uphold quality values. Effective educators possess commendable attributes, skills, and a steadfast dedication to teaching, along with a commitment to public service ethics, and they are attuned to the needs of students, serving as exemplary role models for their peers. Primary school teachers play a pivotal role in the primary education system, ensuring the smooth operation of education and the development of students who embody national educational aspirations.

Similarly, Nurmaya et al. (2019) underscore the critical role of teachers in determining the success of learning within schools. Educators are individuals who have undergone rigorous training and acquired knowledge, skills, and advanced professional competencies through state-sponsored education programs. They are equipped to master subject matter, teaching techniques, and pedagogical skills, and are entrusted with the responsibility of imparting knowledge, skills, and values while nurturing students' self-esteem. Governments have sought to enhance teacher professionalism by raising qualification and educational standards for teaching staff, spanning from primary schools to universities. Amidst the rapid evolution of knowledge and technology and the dynamic shifts in social and cultural landscapes, the expectations regarding professionalism in fulfilling educational tasks continue to escalate.

**Table 2**

### Summary on the Extent of Classroom Learning Environment

No	Indicators	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
1	Positive Classroom	4.36	Very Extensive
2	Diversity Values	3.46	Extensive
3	Persistence	4.52	Very Extensive
<b>Overall</b>		<b>4.11</b>	<b>Extensive</b>

Table 2 provides the summary on the extent of classroom learning environment. It is exhibited that the overall mean of classroom learning environment is 4.11, which is in an extensive level. This means that the classroom learning environment is oftentimes evident.

Data show that all three (3) indicators are in a very extensive level. As arranged chronologically, persistence has the highest mean score (4.52). This is followed by positive classroom (4.36), and diversity values (3.46).

The positive outcomes of this study align with Adesua's (2014) assertion that the classroom environment plays a crucial role in shaping the teaching and learning process. It is noteworthy that the curriculum is predominantly executed within the confines of the classroom, typically under formal educational systems, by professional teachers who act as curriculum implementers. Formal classroom settings are ubiquitous globally, existing in various forms and structures across developed and developing nations, serving as vital arenas of socialization where learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds converge to acquire knowledge.

In a similar vein, Ismail et al. (2015) advocate for effective teachers who hold high expectations for their students while acknowledging individual differences. They advocate for the use of diverse pedagogical approaches while maintaining control over the content of instruction. Effective teachers prioritize fostering a safe learning environment and nurturing relationships among students, continually monitoring their progress and providing tailored feedback. Effective teaching, they argue, necessitates alignment between teachers' individual characteristics and the support provided by school administrators.

Lopes and Oliveira (2017) emphasize the critical role of teachers' competence in managing classroom dynamics and student behavior in achieving positive educational outcomes. Teachers who struggle with behavior management and classroom discipline often face challenges in class control, potentially leading to lower student achievement. The correlation between academic success and effective classroom management is evident, highlighting the importance of maintaining order and discipline within educational settings.

**Table 3**

**Significance of the Relationship Between the Extent of Professionalism of Teachers and Classroom Learning Environment**

<b>Professionalism of Teachers Indicators</b>	<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>r-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Decision on Ho</b>
Teachers' Characters	<b>Classroom Learning Environment</b>	0.617	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Commitment to Change and Continual Improvement		0.610	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge		0.625	0.000	Ho is Rejected
Obligation and Working Relationships Beyond the Classroom		0.605	0.000	Ho is Rejected
<b>Overall</b>		<b>0.614*</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>Ho is Rejected</b>

\*Significant at 0.05 significance level.

Presented in Table 3 are the data on the significance of the relationship between professionalism of teachers and classroom learning environment. Reflected in the hypothesis, the relationship was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The overall r-value of .614 with a p-value of <0.05 signified the rejection of the null hypothesis. It means that there is a significant relationship between professionalism of teachers and classroom learning environment. This shows that professionalism of teachers is correlated with classroom learning environment.

Doing a pairwise correlation among the measures of both variables, it can be gleaned that teachers' characters, commitment to change and continual development, subject and pedagogical knowledge, and obligation and working relationships beyond the classroom revealed computed r-values of 0.617, 0.610, 0.625, and 0.605 respectively with p-values which are less than 0.05 in the level of significance. This implies that as teachers' characters, commitment to change and continual development, subject and pedagogical knowledge, and obligation and working relationships beyond the classroom increases, the classroom learning environment increase.

The findings are consistent with Papay and Kraft's (2017) study, which indicates that the quality of the professional environment significantly influences student outcomes by supporting teachers, facilitating their growth, and enhancing student outcomes. In supportive school environments, teachers are not only more likely to remain in their positions and be effective in their classrooms but also tend to improve at a faster rate over time. Teaching is viewed

as a systematic and purposeful process aimed at creating a conducive learning environment, with the quality of learning closely tied to the quality of teaching in general terms (Tufail & Farooq, 2021).

Similarly, Fantahun (2014) asserted that teacher professionalism is a significant concern in education. Effective teachers exhibit strong intellectual and emotional commitments to both their subjects and their students, setting them apart from their peers. Teacher professionalism is a crucial component in the pursuit of quality education, as professionals demonstrate distinct traits and potentials in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in society.

Indeed (2023) described professionalism in teaching as adherence to a set of implicit and explicit standards expected of educators. Professionalism in education involves interacting appropriately and respectfully with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and other community members to create a conducive learning environment. While teachers are expected to adhere to standards similar to those of other professionals, such as appropriate dress and communication, educators' specific traits demonstrate their ability to act with integrity in an educational setting.

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## Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were offered:

The extent of teachers' professionalism is frequently observable, with three key indicators commonly evident: teachers' characteristics, commitment to change and ongoing improvement, and responsibilities and collaborative relationships beyond the classroom. Additionally, their subject and pedagogical knowledge is consistently apparent. Similarly, the extent of the classroom learning environment is often discernible, particularly through positive classroom atmosphere and teacher perseverance, which are consistently practiced, while the promotion of diversity values is frequently observed. The findings suggest a correlation between teachers' professionalism and the classroom learning environment, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

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## Recommendations

The following suggestions were offered based on the conclusions of the study:

The Department of Education's higher officials hold the potential to devise impactful policies, programs, projects, interventions, and activities aimed at enhancing teachers' professionalism and fostering a positive classroom learning environment. Offering localized, national, and international training opportunities for teachers can significantly bolster their professionalism, thus enabling them to cultivate an enriching classroom atmosphere.

Similarly, school principals play a pivotal role in advancing teachers' professionalism within their respective institutions. They can assess the current status of teachers' professionalism and its impact on the classroom learning environment. Providing continuous learning opportunities, ongoing monitoring, and constructive feedback can empower teachers to embody professionalism and nurture a conducive classroom environment.

Furthermore, teachers themselves can take proactive steps to continually improve their professional skills. Attending diverse seminars, webinars, and relevant events can broaden their understanding of professionalism and its implications for the classroom setting.

Lastly, future researchers may explore additional insights into teachers' professionalism and the classroom learning environment. Utilizing alternative research approaches can further delve into the intricacies of the variables involved in this study.

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