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Navigating Pedagogical Innovation: Unveiling Teachers' Challenges and Strategies in the Evolving Educational Ecosystem

King E. Penkian

Master Teacher 1- Department of Education - Philippines

ABSTRACT

This study explored the challenges teachers faced in innovating pedagogically within evolving educational ecosystems, focusing on both internal and external factors. It identified significant external challenges, such as inconsistent family support, insufficient stakeholder involvement, and students' socioeconomic status, which hindered effective innovation. Internally, frequent curricular changes, such as the transition to the Matatag curriculum, added further complexity to teachers' efforts. In response, teachers employed strategies like fostering collaboration with families and communities through home visitations and community activities, as well as prioritizing personal and professional development through continuous learning, seminars, and graduate studies. This research highlighted the need for stronger family-school partnerships and the ongoing professional development of educators to support pedagogical innovation.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving global education landscape, teachers are increasingly required to embrace pedagogical innovation to effectively prepare students for the challenges of a competitive and interconnected world. Traditional instructional methods, once deemed sufficient, now fall short in addressing the diverse needs of modern learners amidst technological advancements and societal changes. Effective pedagogical innovation goes beyond integrating new teaching strategies and technologies; it also involves cultivating a mindset of creativity, flexibility, and resilience. In this context, the ability to innovate pedagogically is crucial for ensuring that teachers remain effective in dynamic educational environments (Burgonio, 2014).

The educational system in the Philippines, like in many countries, is shaped by a complex interaction of internal and external factors, such as curriculum structures, policy frameworks, economic conditions, and societal expectations. These elements collectively influence teachers' capacity to innovate and adapt their teaching methods. While much of the existing literature has focused on individual factors within these ecosystems, there remains a significant gap in understanding the holistic interplay between these elements and their collective impact on pedagogical innovation. This study seeks to explore these interconnected factors and examine the specific challenges that teachers face when striving to innovate in their classrooms. Identifying both barriers and enablers within the internal and external ecosystems aims to provide insights that could guide effective interventions and support the development of innovative teaching practices in the Philippines (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Niemi, 2021).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Generally, this study aimed to explore and identify the challenges faced by teachers in the evolving educational ecosystem, and to examine the strategies they employ to navigate pedagogical innovation in order to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

- 1. What are the specific challenges that teachers face in their efforts to innovate pedagogically, considering the influence of both internal and external ecosystems of education?
- 2. What are their strategies to resolve these challenges?

Research Design

This study explored the challenges and coping strategies of teachers within educational ecosystems using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, as defined by Creswell (2013), is a qualitative research approach that focuses on exploring and understanding individuals' lived experiences in a particular phenomenon. It seeks to describe how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences, often through in-depth interviews and rich, descriptive data. In the context of this study, phenomenology helps to uncover the unique challenges and coping strategies teachers employ within the complex educational ecosystems they navigate.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted in selected schools across the three congressional districts of Cotabato Province: the First, Second, and Third Districts, which are located in the heart of Mindanao, Philippines. The province is characterized by its diverse geography, including mountain ranges, plains, and bodies of water, with each district facing unique challenges related to agriculture, urbanization, and infrastructure development.

Research Instrument

This study used an interview guide with a primary question and probing questions, which was assessed for content validity by three experts to ensure relevance and accuracy.

Research Participants

In this study, 15 teachers from the initial sample were purposively selected to participate in the qualitative phase of the study. These teachers underwent in-depth interviews to explore their personal experiences, challenges, and strategies related to pedagogical innovation within their specific educational ecosystems. The qualitative phase provided deeper, contextualized insights into the teachers' lived experiences, offering a more nuanced understanding of the quantitative results.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data. This method enables the researcher to identify, analyze, and report patterns and themes within the data, offering an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, challenges, and coping strategies within the educational ecosystem. Thematic analysis requires the identification of patterns or themes in qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) confirmed in their study that it is the first qualitative approach to be studied because it provides key skills that are useful for other types of analytical purposes. Thematic analysis was used to analyze common answers from the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' Challenges on Innovating Pedagogically in the Educational Ecosystem

The first research question sought themes on the challenges of the teachers. Table 1 shows challenges shared by teachers which include: external and internal ecosystems-related challenges.

External Ecosystem-Related Challenges

Inconsistent Family Support. This has emerged as a critical theme on the challenges teachers face in innovating and adapting to the needs of their students. This theme is defined by the participants as the lack of continuous and reliable engagement from families in their children's progress at school, particularly in areas that require collaboration between parents and teachers.

The informants highlighted poor attendance at parent-teacher conferences as a key issue, with many parents attending only the first meeting and not participating later. This makes it difficult for teacher-participants to communicate students' progress and establish partnerships with parents for intervention strategies. The lack of consistent engagement prevents them from tailoring educational interventions for students needing extra support. Inconsistent family support thus creates a significant challenge for teachers trying to innovate and provide the best education, relying on family involvement to address learning gaps and implement solutions.

This confirms the responses of the participants who said that:

"I cannot innovate when it comes to applying new interventions because not many attend the meetings. I can't relay the progress of their children. It's really different when communicating in person because you can better explain the interventions needed." IDI 3

"Hmmm, my challenge is more with the parents who are sometimes present but most of the time are nowhere to be found. And you know what's sad? These are the parents of my students who aren't performing well. That's why I can't really address what needs to be done. I really need their help since follow-up is a big factor." IDI 5

"When innovating teaching methods, it is very important to have the presence of the learner who needs intervention as well as their parents. But the problem is, even if the child is absent, the parents don't care at all. Hu hu hu" IDI 8

Moreover, the informants narrated that it is a challenge for them to reach out to these parents since factors like marital problems and parents working abroad are intervening.

This is supported by the following responses from the participants:

"I would like to give enrichment activities at home, but when they come to school, these are not accomplished because they say no one helps them at home since their mom is abroad, and their only companion is their grandmother." IDI 10

"The biggest challenge for me is reaching out to the parents of the students. I want them to help me because there are learners who really need intervention, and I need to apply novel teaching methods, but parents still play a significant role." IDI 14

"The parents of my pupils are really my problem when it comes to external factors. Some of them have separated and have their own families, so the child is left with the grandparents. The activities and tasks I asked them to bring home is really not accomplished." IDI I

The result implies that inconsistent family support significantly hinders teachers' ability to implement innovative teaching methods and address the needs of students. When parents fail to engage consistently in school activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings, teachers are unable to provide tailored interventions for struggling students. This lack of collaboration, compounded by external factors like parents working abroad or family issues, further exacerbates the challenges of fostering student success through effective teaching strategies.

In a similar vein, research indicates that effective family-school partnerships are crucial for student success, but developing these collaborations remains challenging Barriers to parental involvement include discrepant perspectives on student needs, which can lead to parent-teacher conflicts (Lasater, 2016).

Insufficient Stakeholder Involvement. This is the second theme that emerged in relation to external ecosystem challenges, which continues to pose a significant barrier for teachers striving to innovate pedagogically. They shared that when stakeholders—such as parents, community members, local businesses, or government entities—are not fully engaged, it becomes difficult for teachers to implement innovative strategies that could enhance student learning and academic performance. The lack of support from these stakeholders, particularly for academic programs and other school activities, exacerbates the issue. Teachers expressed that parents and local government officials often fail to recognize the value of innovative academic initiatives.

In support, the participants mentioned that:

"Hmm, when it comes to external factors, I don't have any problems with the parents of my students, but with the stakeholders, there's a bit of a challenge. There was one time I invited someone to share his knowledge in cross-stitching because I knew he was good at it, but he never responded to my invitation."

IDI 15

"The challenge for me, or what I feel is a lack of support, is with the stakeholders. They don't have the willingness to assist us when it comes to implementing interventions" IDI 11

Further, the respondents supplied answers that focuses on missed opportunities for community engagement.

Corollary to this, a participant narrated that:

"As a teacher, I feel that one of the biggest missed opportunities for community engagement is when we don't involve the local businesses or organizations in our school activities. There's so much potential for collaboration indeed." IDI 2

"As a teacher, there are times that I think stakeholders would help me implement pedagogical innovation. Like last year, I was planning to create a dictionary of Arumanen Manobo, but I didn't know who to approach until I eventually forgot about it. I wish I had reached out to the elders of the community." IDI 12

The preceding narratives imply that insufficient stakeholder involvement hampers teachers' efforts to innovate pedagogically, as the lack of engagement from parents, businesses, and government limits the implementation of effective strategies. This results in missed opportunities for collaboration and community engagement, with teachers struggling to find support for academic programs. The failure to recognize the value of local resources leaves teachers feeling unsupported in their initiatives.

This observation concurs the study of Walimbwa et al. (2022) who concluded that challenges in implementing innovative ideas persist due to the lack of collaborative stakeholder involvement. Many new teachers feel unprepared for their roles, as parent participation and community engagement are often minimal. This limited support hinders the successful implementation of new educational strategies.

Pupils' socioeconomic status. The last theme that emerged pertains to pupils' socioeconomic status, which is considered a significant challenge for teachers. The lack of sufficient supplementary learning materials at home greatly impacts the continuation of pedagogical innovation beyond the classroom, as students may not have access to the resources needed to support their learning.

Teachers expressed that the absence of these materials limits students' ability to fully engage with and apply innovative strategies, hindering their academic progress.

Additionally, the teacher-informants confessed that parents' limited literacy skills further hinder their efforts to implement pedagogical innovations. Many parents are unable to provide the necessary academic support at home, as they lack the knowledge or skills to assist with their children's learning. This lack of involvement from parents makes it difficult for teachers to extend their innovative approaches outside the classroom, as the home environment becomes a critical factor in reinforcing educational strategies.

To affirm this, the participants narrated that:

"It is hard for me to maximize my innovative pedagogy since the pupils I target don't have anyone at home to facilitate their learning. Most of them don't have anyone at home to guide them, so I feel limited in what I can do in class." IDI 13

"Ummmm, in terms of the external ecosystem, I think the challenge is ensuring that the intervention continues at home. Sometimes, I just stop if I know there's no follow-up at home. Usually, these learners don't have any learning materials available at home. It's difficult to keep up with the progress when they lack the resources at home." IDI 4

"As a teacher for quite a long time, I can really say that it is so hard to implement new teaching strategies in the classroom, but when it comes to the students' homes, there's no review or follow-up. I always remind the parents of my learners that it is very important to allocate some time at home, even just a little, to go over the lessons of their child. Without support at home, it's like starting over every time." IDI 7

In addition, teacher-participants shared that innovating pedagogically becomes more challenging due to many learners coming from low-income households. These students often lack access to basic learning resources, such as technology. Without sufficient home support, as many parents struggle to provide educational assistance, it becomes difficult for students to keep up with innovative teaching methods.

One response from the participant revealed that:

"The challenging part is the fact that the children are not exposed to technology. Let us admit it, nowadays, children grasp innovations better if they are familiar with technology. It's hard to implement technology-based teaching strategies when they don't have the exposure or tools to engage with them."

IDI 6

"If we focus on the external factors, I think one challenge is the fact that some learners come from low-income households, so they do not have access to technology. It is hard to require students to immerse themselves in technology when they don't have any gadgets at home. I remember one time our topic was all about fake news, and I wanted them to scrutinize actual news to determine whether it was fake or legitimate, but I couldn't maximize the activity since some of the learners didn't have access to technology." IDI 9

The data implies that the socioeconomic status of pupils plays a crucial role in the success of pedagogical innovation. Teachers pointed out that students from low-income households often face significant barriers, such as a lack of access to technology and essential learning materials, which prevent them from fully engaging with and benefiting from innovative teaching methods.

The mentioned implication accords to the finding of Abella (2016) that teachers' pedagogical innovations in classrooms are profoundly influenced by various factors, with family support being a key element. The involvement of families plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of teaching strategies, as it provides students with a supportive environment that reinforces learning beyond the classroom. Without this social support, especially in households with limited resources or low parental involvement, the impact of pedagogical innovations can be significantly diminished, hindering the students' ability to fully engage and apply what they learn.

Internal Ecosystem-Related Challenges

Curricular Changes. Teachers highlighted that within the internal ecosystem of education, the continuous uncertainties brought about by frequent curricular changes have become a major source of stress and difficulty. The recent transition from the K to 12 system to the Matatag curriculum posed a significant challenge. Participants expressed that the sudden shift demanded a rapid adaptation, requiring them to quickly familiarize themselves with new concepts, guidelines, and teaching methods. This added pressure was compounded by their already demanding responsibilities in the classroom, leaving little time for proper preparation or professional development. The fast-paced changes in curriculum structure meant that teachers were not only expected to learn and teach new content but also to adjust their teaching strategies to align with updated standards and educational goals.

As a result, many teachers found themselves in a constant cycle of adapting to changes, making it harder to focus on long-term teaching goals or embrace innovative pedagogical practices. The lack of curricular stability, teachers noted, hinders their ability to implement and fully explore new strategies, as they are often preoccupied with staying current with the latest revisions. Consequently, the potential for integrating more effective and creative teaching approaches is significantly limited, as the ever-changing nature of the curriculum forces them to focus primarily on catching up rather than refining their methods and enhancing their students' learning experiences. One participant expressed that:

"In terms of internal factors, the biggest challenge is the curricular changes. I know that as a teacher, you need to adapt to changes, but the transition from K to 12 to the Matatag curriculum happened so quickly that it felt like I didn't have time to adjust. All the new content and strategies had to be learned immediately. There's so much pressure to keep up, and sometimes it feels like I'm holding back on some of my innovative teaching methods because I'm always thinking about how to align my lessons with the new standards." IDI 4

Another participant confessed that:

"When it comes to internal factors, the change from K to 12 to the Matatag curriculum is really a challenge. It felt sudden, and there was no time to really process the changes. We had to master the new components while still handling our regular responsibilities. It's difficult because the curriculum lacks stability, which makes it hard to properly execute long-term plans or integrate new teaching methods. What happens is, instead of focusing on innovative strategies, we're just busy catching up with the shifts in the curriculum." IDI 9

Further, they also mentioned that they had to start all over again with lesson exemplars, curriculum guides, and even the format of the Daily Lesson Log, which was changed. As a result, they really needed to cope with the changes.

Two participants expressed this viewpoint:

"In terms of internal factors, one of the biggest challenges right now is the need to innovate teaching methods while adjusting to the new changes. The lesson exemplars, curriculum guides, and even the Daily Lesson Log format have all been changed, making it difficult for us to focus on creating new teaching strategies. In other words, we are too busy catching up with the changes, which is preventing us from maximizing the opportunity to explore new and creative ways to teach." IDI 11

"As a Grade 4 teacher, another challenge is the numerous changes in the curriculum and formats. Almost all of our time is spent adjusting to the new guidelines, so we don't have much time to apply new teaching methods." IDI 15

The finding implies that the rapid curricular changes have created a significant challenge for teachers, as they struggle to keep up with the frequent adjustments to new content, strategies, and formats. This lack of stability hinders teachers from focusing on innovative pedagogical approaches, as their attention is diverted to adapting to the shifts. As a result, teachers face difficulty in properly integrating new teaching methods, limiting their ability to explore creative and effective ways to enhance their students' learning experiences.

The abovementioned implication is in harmony with the study of Judijanto et al. (2024) that teachers face with frequent curriculum changes. Teachers struggle to adapt to new content and strategies, hindering their ability to implement innovative pedagogical approaches. While generally open to change, teachers often struggle with effective implementation, reverting to traditional methods due to inadequate training, resource constraints, and time limitations.

Table 1. Themes on the Teachers' Challenges on Innovating Pedagogically in the Educational Ecosystems

| Global Themes | Basic Themes | Core Ideas |
|---|---|---|
| External Ecosystem- Related Challenges | Inconsistent Family Support | Poor attendance during parent-teacher conferences |
| | | Lack of parental presence at home |
| | | Marital problems |
| | Insufficient Stakeholder Involvement | Unsupportive stakeholders to school programs and activities |
| | | Missed opportunities for community engagement |
| | Pupils' socioeconomic status | Lack of sufficient supplementary learning materials at home |
| | | Parents' limited literacy skills |
| | | Learners from disadvantaged households |
| Internal Ecosystem- Related Challenges | Curricular Changes | Abrupt shift from Kto12 to Matatag curriculum |
| | | Adaptation burden |

Strategies of Teachers to Address the Challenges on Innovating Pedagogically in the Educational Ecosystems

The second research question in the phase 2 divulges the strategies of teachers to address the challenges on innovating pedagogically in the educational ecosystems. The teachers shared their expressed different insights with their experiences in coping with the challenges. Based on their experiences and their honest responses, two global themes were extracted: fostering collaboration and innovation and personal and professional development. Table 2 displays the discussion of each theme, supported by responses from the teachers.

Fostering Collaboration and Innovation

Conduct of Maximum Advocacy. The first global theme that emerged in strategies to address the identified challenges is the conduct of maximum advocacy. Teacher-participants in the study acknowledged that the level of family and community support was not as high as they would have liked, which has motivated them to commit strongly to innovating their teaching methods. Faced with these challenges, they understand the critical role families and communities play in supporting students' education, especially for those at risk of dropping out.

To bridge this gap, teachers have adopted innovative approaches such as conducting home visitations. These visitations provide an opportunity to engage directly with learners and their families, particularly those who are struggling or at risk of disengaging from school. Through these visits, teachers can better understand the students' home environment, establish stronger relationships with parents and guardians, and offer the necessary support to help these learners succeed. These home visitations allow teachers to identify any external factors, such as financial or familial challenges, that may be affecting a student's performance and well-being, enabling them to provide more targeted interventions.

Additionally, communication with parents and guardians is emphasized. Teachers are reaching out through various channels, ensuring that there is a continuous dialogue about students' progress, needs, and any challenges they face. This active engagement is crucial for building trust and collaboration between teachers and families, ultimately helping to create a more supportive educational ecosystem.

To affirm this, participants said that:

"My strategy is to put in extra effort for the children. I conduct home visitations and talk to the parents or guardians. I make sure we have a mutual agreement so that my pedagogical interventions can be more effective. "IDI 1

To increase stakeholder involvement, I organized community activities. I coordinated with the barangay and purok leaders to make the activities successful such as information drive. I also saw that people became more active in these opportunities. "IDI I

"The first thing I did was accept the fact that the parents of my learners are not really participative. So, I dedicated extra time and effort to reach out to them through various forms of communication. I focused on building a good connection with them." IDI 14

Further, the participants mentioned that they consistently and timely monitored the learners' progress. This approach helped ensure that the students received the necessary support for improvement. Additionally, they sought sponsors for books to be given to learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

This initiative aimed to provide the students with the necessary resources to support their learning. It also helped bridge the gap in access to educational materials.

In fact, one participant said that:

"I, along with my co-teacher, scheduled regular home visitations. This is aimed at monitoring the learners' progress and providing feedback. This way, we can ensure continuous support for their development." IDI 7

In addition to this response, another participant said that:

"I have a friend who works at a non-government organization. He told me that he could donate books, so I sent a letter to their office, and by God's grace, we were given books. I made sure to lend them to my learners, especially those who don't have access to books." IDI 9

The conduct of maximum advocacy emphasizes the need for stronger family and community support in education. Teachers have taken proactive steps, like home visitations and community activities, to engage stakeholders and provide continuous support. This approach has strengthened relationships with parents and guardians, creating a more supportive environment for at-risk learners.

The finding supports the study of Quezada et al. (2013), which highlights the importance of family and community engagement in education and the need for stronger support systems. Home visits have been shown to foster meaningful relationships between schools and families, strengthening the learning community. Educators are encouraged to create effective ways to engage with diverse students and families, acknowledging the role of backgrounds and dispositions in bridging school-home connections.

Personal and Professional Development

Advancement of Knowledge and Expertise. The last theme that emerged in the strategies of teachers in coping with the challenges of innovating pedagogically focused on the development of their personal and professional aspects. They shared that there is a need to advance their knowledge, skills, and values due to the inevitable curricular changes. They enroll in graduate studies and embrace the essence of lifelong learning by attending seminars and training.

Responses from three informants revealed that:

"To adapt to the changes, I became eager to attend the 1-week Matatag Curriculum training. I learned more about the new curriculum, and I like it more than the previous one, although I still need to study other competencies." IDI 15

"I address the problem by attending the Matatag Curriculum training, where I discovered the new format of the Daily Lesson Log based on the MATATAG acronym. It was all worth it, and my knowledge was truly upgraded." IDI 11

"I'm more confident in implementing the new curriculum because of the training I attended. That's how I address the challenge." IDI 4

The participants reiterated that they are not doing this solely for promotion, but because they genuinely want to grow, as there is learning that becomes obsolete and needs to be updated.

In support two participants reiterated that:

"I address the challenges by enrolling in a master's degree. I learned so much during my master's journey, and that's really my goal – to update my knowledge aside from getting promoted." IDI 5

"In innovating pedagogically, I get ideas from my classmates in the master's program. I really love our exchange of ideas." IDI 2

The responses imply the importance of continuous learning and professional development for teachers to adapt to curriculum changes and innovate pedagogically. Through attending training, enrolling in graduate studies, and engaging in idea exchange, teachers aim to enhance their skills and knowledge, driven by a genuine desire to grow rather than for career advancement alone.

The implication aligns with Nkolika (2024), emphasizing the critical role of continuous professional development (CPD) in helping teachers navigate curriculum changes and implement innovative teaching strategies. CPD empowers educators with the latest knowledge and practical skills, enhancing their capacity to effectively adapt and innovate in the classroom.

In a similar vein, a study by Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017) emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) in empowering teachers to adapt to new curriculum standards and foster pedagogical innovation. The study highlights that CPD plays a crucial role in improving teachers' instructional practices and ultimately enhances student learning outcomes.

Table 2. Themes on the Strategies of Teachers to Address the Challenges on Innovating Pedagogically in the Educational Ecosystems

| Global Themes | Basic Themes | Core Ideas |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| Fostering Collaboration and Innovation | Conduct of maximum advocacy | Extra effort in family and community engagement |
| | | Doing home visitations |
| | | Initiating community-involved activities |
| | | Consistent and timely monitoring of learners' progress |
| Personal and Professional | Advancement of Knowledge and | Enrolling to graduate studies |
| Development | Expertise | Engagement to seminars and trainings |

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the challenges faced by teachers in innovating pedagogically are deeply influenced by both external and internal ecosystems. External challenges such as inconsistent family support, insufficient stakeholder involvement, and the socioeconomic status of students significantly hinder teachers' ability to implement effective and innovative teaching strategies. Internal challenges, including frequent curricular changes, add further strain, leaving educators to focus more on adapting to shifting guidelines than on fostering pedagogical innovation.

Despite these hurdles, teachers have demonstrated resilience through various strategies. By fostering collaboration with families and communities, such as through home visitations and community-based activities, teachers have worked to bridge gaps in support and ensure continued student progress. Furthermore, personal and professional development plays a crucial role in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate curricular changes and innovate within their classrooms. These strategies highlight the importance of ongoing learning, adaptability, and community engagement in overcoming the challenges of pedagogical innovation.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study suggest several key actions for improving the capacity of teachers to innovate pedagogically within their educational environments. Strengthening family and community engagement is crucial, as teachers must be supported in conducting home visitations and organizing community-driven activities to foster strong, collaborative relationships with families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools should allocate resources or incentives to facilitate these efforts, acknowledging that family involvement is vital for student success. Additionally, schools and educational authorities should prioritize the involvement of local stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, businesses, and government entities. Developing effective communication channels and fostering partnerships can gain the necessary support and resources to implement innovative teaching strategies. Addressing socioeconomic barriers is another essential aspect; schools should seek partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and government programs to provide supplementary resources such as books and technology to students who lack them at home, ensuring equitable access to innovative learning opportunities. Finally, continuous professional development must be integrated into the educational system. Schools should offer regular training on new curricula, teaching strategies, and technology integration, while encouraging teachers to pursue graduate studies and participate in seminars. Fostering a culture of lifelong learning can remain well-equipped to adapt to new educational trends and confidently implement innovative approaches in their classrooms.

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