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FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: EXPLORING TEACHERS' REALMS IN IMPLEMENTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM IN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in implementing Continuous Improvement (C.I.) projects and programs in schools within Talomo West District, Davao City using phenomenological inquiry. Findings showed that data-informed planning, managing constraints, collaborative culture, and stakeholder engagement shaped teachers' C.I. experiences. Teachers viewed C.I. as meaningful when evidence guided priorities, teamwork reduced isolation, and monitoring tools supported follow-through despite workload pressures. Coping strategies included strategic time and workload management, collaborative problem solving, and protecting motivation and emotional well-being through small wins and clear boundaries. These patterns supported the Normalization Process Theory of May and Finch and highlighted the role of shared routines and reflection in sustaining C.I. Educational management insights underscored the need for strategic leadership, shared ownership, and practical support systems, aligning with the Theory of Practice Architectures and the Theory of Organizational Readiness for Change. Recommendations emphasized strengthening school routines for data use, institutionalizing collaborative monitoring systems, and building community partnerships that support resources and morale. Overall, the study deepened understanding of how teachers sustain C.I. through evidence-based planning, shared leadership, and well-being-protective strategies in real school contexts.

KEYWORDS/PHRASES: *Continuous Improvement, Data-Informed Planning, Collaborative Culture, Coping Strategies, Educational Management Insights*

INTRODUCTION
As a teacher and researcher, I have observed that many elementary schools struggle to sustain Continuous Improvement (C.I.) projects because implementation practices vary widely across schools and over time. In my professional experience, improvement plans are often introduced with enthusiasm but lose momentum due to limited follow-up, unclear roles, and competing school demands. I have also witnessed teachers exert effort in documenting activities while receiving minimal guidance on how these initiatives are monitored and supported. These experiences lead me to value teachers' voices because they reveal how improvement efforts are actually carried out in daily school life. This situation points to the persistent problem of inconsistent and weakly monitored Continuous Improvement implementation in schools, which serves as a transition to the succeeding discussion.

In the United States, schools often face challenges in sustaining Continuous Improvement efforts due to uneven coaching support and fragmented monitoring systems. While improvement frameworks are widely promoted, their execution varies depending on leadership capacity and resource availability. Woulfin et al. (2023) explained that coaching for Continuous Improvement becomes less effective when follow-through and accountability structures are weak. Similarly, Lyon et al. (2024) emphasized that implementation efforts lose impact when monitoring mechanisms are not consistently embedded in school routines. As a result, improvement initiatives may exist in plans but fail to produce lasting changes in practice.

In the United Kingdom, Continuous Improvement initiatives are also affected by inconsistencies in coordination and leadership oversight. Schools may adopt improvement cycles, yet struggle to sustain them amid changing priorities and external pressures. Tezel et al. (2023) noted that Continuous Improvement systems require stable structures and clear responsibilities to function effectively over time. In addition, Hulme et al. (2023) highlighted that during periods of disruption, such as crises, monitoring and collaborative improvement processes often weaken. Consequently, improvement efforts become uneven and difficult to sustain across schools.

In Japan, government-led excellence and improvement initiatives demonstrate strong policy direction and clear national goals, yet challenges often emerge during actual school-level implementation. Although schools may formally align their plans with national standards, they frequently struggle with ensuring consistent and sustained monitoring at the local level. Yonezawa (2023) explained that large-scale improvement reforms do not always translate smoothly into meaningful school-based practices due to contextual and operational gaps. In the same way, Elbanna et al. (2024) pointed out that organizational constraints, such as workload pressures and limited coordination, can restrict continuous monitoring and reflective improvement processes. As a result, improvement efforts may become procedural and compliance-driven rather than deeply embedded in teachers' daily work and school culture.

Taking things in Philippine context, particularly in Metro Manila, schools implementing Continuous Improvement often encounter difficulties due to frequent reforms and overlapping management demands. Improvement initiatives may be introduced rapidly, leaving limited time for systematic monitoring and teacher support. Cabaya et al. (2025) showed that curriculum transitions can strain school systems and weaken consistent implementation practices. Mangarin (2023) further noted that management challenges and resource gaps can affect how improvement strategies are sustained and evaluated. As a result, Continuous Improvement efforts may remain uneven across schools.

In the Davao Region, schools experience similar issues related to the consistency and monitoring of Continuous Improvement programs. Teachers often manage multiple initiatives simultaneously, which can dilute focus and follow-up. Requillo et al. (2024) revealed that teachers' experiences in school-based programs reflect challenges in coordination and sustained monitoring. Guillermo (2025) also highlighted the importance of strong governance and tracking systems to ensure continuous quality improvement. Without these supports, improvement efforts risk becoming short-term and fragmented.

Within Talomo West District, schools face practical constraints that affect the sustained implementation of Continuous Improvement projects, particularly when monitoring is irregular and feedback on progress, impact, and outcomes remains limited. Although teachers may comply with required activities and documentation, competing school demands, limited time, and shifting administrative priorities may reduce their motivation and create unclear direction in sustaining improvement efforts. A methodological and contextual gap is evident because many studies focus on policies, outcomes, or administrative perspectives, while fewer explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers implementing Continuous Improvement in local school settings. Thus, a qualitative phenomenological approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand how teachers experience, interpret, and cope with monitoring gaps, workload pressures, and practical constraints in real school contexts. Therefore, this study was necessary to generate management insights that may help school leaders and policymakers strengthen support systems, monitoring practices, and meaningful Continuous Improvement implementation in Talomo West District.

The current study is anchored on the Theory of Practice Architectures by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), which explains that school practices are shaped by sayings, doings, and relatings influenced by cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political conditions. This theory fits the study because Continuous Improvement in Talomo West District is carried out through teachers' daily actions, conversations, relationships, and school conditions, not only through written plans. The study is further grounded on Normalization Process Theory by May and Finch (2009), which explains how a new way of working becomes routinely embedded, sustained, and evaluated in everyday practice. This theory helps interpret why Continuous Improvement becomes sustained in some schools but remains inconsistent and weakly monitored in others. Moreover, Weiner's (2009) Theory of Organizational Readiness for Change supports the study by explaining how teachers' shared commitment, confidence, motivation, and perceived support influence their ability to sustain Continuous Improvement projects over time.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in implementing Continuous Improvement projects in Talomo West District. I used a phenomenological approach to deeply understand how teachers made sense of their roles, challenges, adjustments, and responsibilities as they carried out improvement initiatives within their school contexts. Through in-depth interviews, I gathered their personal stories, struggles, coping strategies, and reflections on how monitoring gaps, workload pressures, limited feedback, and practical constraints affected their participation in Continuous Improvement. This study aimed to give voice to their real-life experiences and to identify management insights that may help improve the implementation, monitoring, and sustainability of Continuous Improvement projects in elementary schools. By understanding their perspectives, I hoped to provide meaningful recommendations for strengthening school support systems, improving feedback mechanisms, and making Continuous Improvement practices more consistent, practical, and teacher-responsive in Talomo West District.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in implementing Continuous Improvement projects and programs in Talomo West District, Davao City. This design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gather rich and detailed descriptions from the informants' personal experiences in planning, implementing, monitoring, and sustaining school-based improvement initiatives. Through phenomenology, the study focused on how teachers understood their roles, challenges, coping mechanisms, collaboration practices, and management insights in carrying out Continuous Improvement. It also helped identify common meanings and themes from their shared narratives. Thus, the approach provided a deeper understanding of their professional, emotional, organizational, and school-level realities in implementing Continuous Improvement projects and programs.

The researcher observed ethical standards by ensuring social value, informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participant safety. The study aimed to help school heads, teachers, DepEd officials, and other education stakeholders understand the real conditions of teachers who implemented Continuous Improvement projects in their schools. Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the interview procedures, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Their identities were protected through codes or pseudonyms, while their narratives were presented without

revealing personal or school-identifying details. All gathered data were stored securely and handled responsibly in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

The study involved ten (10) elementary school teachers from Talomo West District, Davao City who had direct experience in implementing Continuous Improvement projects and programs. They were chosen through purposive sampling because they had participated in planning, implementing, monitoring, or evaluating C.I. initiatives in their respective schools. The participants were required to be currently teaching in public elementary schools, have direct involvement in Continuous Improvement activities, and be willing to share their experiences through in-depth interviews. The main research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions about their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, monitoring practices, collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and management insights. This guide was validated by experts and refined to ensure clarity, relevance, and credibility in capturing the lived experiences of teachers implementing Continuous Improvement projects and programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results generated from the data gathered. It is sequenced based on the objectives of the study as presented in the first chapter.

Experiences of Teachers in Implementing Continuous Improvement Projects and Programs

Results revealed that elementary school teachers experienced Continuous Improvement as more meaningful when planning and reflection were guided by actual school data. One teacher shared, *"nagsugod mi sa baseline data aron klaro kung unsay ayuhon una,"* while another stated that reviewing scores and outputs gave a true picture of learner needs. These narratives show that data helped teachers identify priorities, examine root causes, align goals with the School Improvement Plan, and avoid scattered improvement efforts. This finding supports Tamplin Jr. (2025) and Joyner (2023), who emphasized that data-informed instruction and teacher capacity in data use strengthen purposeful decision-making. Thus, teachers' experiences showed that Continuous Improvement became clearer and more focused when it was grounded on evidence, reflection, and shared school targets.

The findings also showed that teachers experienced challenges in sustaining Continuous Improvement because of workload, time pressure, limited resources, and documentation demands. One participant stated, *"Lisod i-apas ang C.I. tasks tungod daghan pud mi lesson duties ug reports,"* while another shared that simplifying forms helped sustain momentum. These statements show that teachers managed constraints by using fixed schedules, breaking tasks into smaller steps, improvising materials, sharing resources, using community donations, and simplifying monitoring tools. This supports Dill (2022), Chand (2025), and Yurkofsky (2022), who noted that workload, resource limitations, and burdensome documentation can affect the sustainability of school improvement efforts. Hence, teachers' experiences reflected the need for practical systems that reduce burden while keeping Continuous Improvement purposeful and manageable.

Moreover, the study found that teachers experienced Continuous Improvement as stronger when collaboration, shared leadership, stakeholder engagement, and community support were present. One teacher shared, *"teamwork ang susi sa sustainability sa C.I. implementation,"* while another stated that explaining C.I. goals helped parents support and learners understand the process. These narratives reveal that teachers relied on co-planning, team accountability, peer mentoring, leadership check-ins, clear communication, community partnerships, and recognition of small wins to sustain motivation and implementation. This finding agrees with Zimmerman (2024), Bauer (2025), and Sattar et al. (2022), who emphasized that collaboration, leadership support, and stakeholder participation strengthen school improvement efforts. Overall, the lived experiences of teachers showed that Continuous Improvement became more sustainable when it was data-informed, collaborative, well-supported, resource-sensitive, and shared by the whole school community.

Creative Strategies of Teachers in Continuous Improvement Implementation

Results revealed that elementary school teachers coped with Continuous Improvement challenges by managing time and workload pressures strategically. One teacher shared, *"Kung daghan kaayo trabaho, among giuna ang C.I. tasks nga directo maka-improve sa learners,"* while another stated, *"Nag-time block ko para sa C.I. documentation,"* showing how teachers prioritized high-impact tasks and protected time for C.I. work. These narratives show that teachers selected important indicators, set fixed days for monitoring, used short tracking periods, and broke tasks into smaller steps to avoid overload. This finding supports Fadare et al. (2024), da Silva (2023), and Gavin and McGrath-Champ (2024), who emphasized that practical workload strategies, task prioritization, and organized routines help teachers sustain performance under pressure. Thus, teachers sustained C.I. implementation by focusing on meaningful tasks, creating structured schedules, and maintaining consistent small actions.

The findings also showed that teachers used collaborative support to overcome implementation barriers in C.I. projects and programs. One participant stated, *"Kung stuck ko sa intervention, mangayo ko og idea sa kauban,"* while another shared that regular check-ins with leaders provided guidance and monitoring discipline. These statements show that teachers relied on peer assistance, team brainstorming, school head consultation, early reporting of resource concerns, buddy systems, mentoring, and peer checking of documentation. This supports Miller et al. (2024), Roshan et al. (2025), and Deroncele-Acosta and Ellis (2024), who noted that shared

problem-solving, teamwork, and peer support strengthen implementation during challenging conditions. Hence, collaborative support helped teachers reduce confusion, improve monitoring, correct errors, and sustain C.I. progress through shared responsibility.

In addition, the study found that teachers protected their motivation and emotional well-being while implementing Continuous Improvement. One teacher shared, *"Kung mapakyas ang intervention, akong tan-awon siya isip lesson, dili kapakyasan,"* while another stated that celebrating small progress helped keep the team's energy. These narratives reveal that teachers used positive reframing, re-explaining the purpose of C.I., recognizing effort, giving simple praise, setting time boundaries, taking short rests, and practicing self-care to prevent burnout. This finding agrees with Shen et al. (2024), Pozo-Rico et al. (2023), Chen (2023), and Goodwin et al. (2023), who emphasized that motivation, emotional competence, reframing, and professional support help teachers remain resilient in demanding work. Overall, the creative strategies of teachers supported Normalization Process Theory by showing how C.I. became more workable when teachers organized routines, strengthened collaboration, and protected their emotional readiness to sustain improvement practices.

Educational Management Insights from Teachers' Experiences in Implementing Continuous Improvement Projects and Programs

Results revealed that elementary school teachers gained educational management insights on the importance of strategic leadership and clear direction in sustaining Continuous Improvement. One teacher shared, *"Kung klaro ang vision sa C.I., mas sayon namo mahibalo unsay angay unahon,"* while another stated that school goals should be seen in daily classroom actions, not only on paper. These narratives show that teachers valued clear vision, realistic targets, active instructional leadership, regular check-ins, timely feedback, and accountability systems with defined roles and deadlines. This finding supports Huda et al. (2025) and Pana (2024), who emphasized that strategic and instructional leadership strengthen work culture, teacher performance, and school improvement outcomes. Thus, teachers' insights showed that C.I. becomes more coherent and sustainable when leaders provide clear direction, guidance, and follow-through.

The findings also showed that teachers recognized the importance of collaborative culture and shared ownership in Continuous Improvement implementation. One participant shared, *"Ang C.I. mas molampos kung shared ang trabaho,"* while another stated that peer coaching helped teachers follow the process and build confidence in implementation. These statements show that teachers valued shared responsibility, teamwork, peer coaching, skill sharing, regular communication, safe meeting spaces, and team check-ins. This supports Wulandari and Hardhienata (2025) and Lin and Mohammad (2025), who noted that mutual cooperation, collaborative leadership, and shared accountability strengthen teacher creativity and school improvement. Hence, teachers' insights reflected that C.I. becomes more effective when improvement work is treated as a collective responsibility rather than the burden of one person.

Moreover, the study found that teachers emphasized the need to strengthen resource management and practical support systems for C.I. sustainability. One teacher stated, *"bisag gamay ang budget, mahimo gihapon ang improvement kung creative ang approach,"* while another shared that community partnerships can add support to school improvement programs. These narratives reveal that teachers learned to maximize limited resources, share materials, improvise supplies, build community partnerships, practice transparent reporting, distribute workload fairly, and protect teacher well-being through moral support and clear guidance. This finding agrees with Putri et al. (2024), Burhan et al. (2024), and Epstein et al. (2024), who emphasized that resource management, stakeholder partnership, and supportive systems help sustain quality improvement in schools. Overall, the educational management insights support Weiner's Theory of Organizational Readiness for Change by showing that C.I. is sustained when teachers share commitment, receive practical support, and feel confident to carry out improvement work.

IMPLICATIONS

As regards to the lived experiences of teachers, the findings imply that educational management practices need to strengthen the practice conditions that make Continuous Improvement (C.I.) consistent and meaningful in schools. Teachers experienced stronger implementation when data-informed planning, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement were supported through clear routines, shared language, and workable systems. This supports the Theory of Practice Architectures of Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) because the teachers' experiences show that C.I. practices are shaped by cultural–discursive arrangements (shared understanding of goals and data), material–economic arrangements (time, tools, resources), and social–political arrangements (leadership guidance and shared roles). The themes indicate that when these arrangements are weak, monitoring becomes inconsistent and implementation loses momentum. Therefore, the findings support the theory, and school leaders need to build structures that align language, resources, and roles to sustain C.I. work.

In terms of coping mechanisms, the findings imply that educational management practices need to help teachers normalize C.I. actions into daily work rather than treating them as add-on tasks. Teachers sustained C.I. by prioritizing key tasks, scheduling documentation, breaking work into manageable steps, and relying on collaborative support to solve barriers. This supports the Normalization Process Theory of May and Finch (2009) because teachers worked to develop shared meaning of C.I. (coherence), engage others in the work (cognitive participation), carry out tasks through routines and teamwork (collective action), and reflect on progress through tracking and check-ins (reflexive monitoring). Their narratives show that when schools provide clear processes and peer support, C.I. becomes more

doable and stable. Therefore, the findings support the theory, and school management needs to formalize time, teamwork, and monitoring routines that help C.I. become part of normal school practice.

Finally, the educational management insights imply that school systems need to strengthen readiness by building clear direction, shared ownership, and practical support for C.I. Teachers emphasized that strategic leadership, accountability systems, and resource partnerships improved follow-through and reduced implementation drop-off. This supports the Theory of Organizational Readiness for Change of Weiner (2009) because the findings reflect both change commitment (shared responsibility, motivation, ownership) and change efficacy (confidence built through guidance, capacity building, and available supports). Their experiences suggest that readiness increases when teachers believe the school is capable of change and when the work feels collectively owned. Therefore, the findings support the theory, and school leaders need to strengthen commitment and capability through consistent leadership actions, capacity-building support, and fair resource and workload systems.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the findings, DepEd officials are encouraged to strengthen Continuous Improvement implementation by institutionalizing data-informed planning, clear monitoring tools, regular reflection cycles, practical documentation systems, and capacity-building on root-cause analysis and follow-through. School heads may support this by clarifying improvement priorities, setting realistic targets, assigning clear roles and deadlines, aligning C.I. with SIP priorities, and nurturing collaboration through co-planning, peer mentoring, regular check-ins, and practical resource support. Teachers may sustain C.I. by prioritizing high-impact tasks, using time-blocking strategies, breaking work into manageable steps, joining team problem-solving, practicing peer coaching, and protecting their motivation through positive reframing, small wins, and healthy boundaries. Learners may also contribute by participating in feedback, monitoring their progress, supporting positive classroom routines, and developing reflective habits that strengthen learning outcomes and consistency. Future researchers may conduct longitudinal, mixed-methods, comparative, or qualitative studies on how C.I. affects teaching practices, learner performance, monitoring systems, leadership, collaboration, workload, well-being, and community support across different school contexts.

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