



BEYOND THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE CLASSROOM: TEACHING LEARNERS' LIFE SKILLS TOWARD SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in promoting life skills among learners to prepare them for success beyond academic achievement in the Division of Davao City. Specifically, it examined their experiences, the ways they coped with the challenges encountered, and the educational insights drawn from the findings. Anchored in a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study gathered data through in-depth interviews with five (5) participants and focus group discussions with five (5) participants to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that, in terms of the experiences of teachers in teaching life skills to learners toward success in life, three major themes emerged: real-world relevance and student engagement, lack of structured curriculum on life skills, and holistic development through life skills. These findings indicated that teachers recognized life skills education as meaningful and essential, yet they also faced challenges. In coping with these challenges, the findings showed that teachers addressed them through the integration of life skills in daily lessons, allowing them to naturally embed life skills instruction into their regular teaching practices. Furthermore, the educational insights drawn from the study highlighted that life skills are foundational for lifelong learning, teacher support and training are crucial, and education must go beyond academics.

KEYWORDS: *four corners of classrooms, life skills, success, educational management, real-world relevance*

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Background

Teaching life skills has become an essential component of education in today's rapidly changing world, where learners are expected to possess not only academic knowledge but also critical competencies such as problem-solving, communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. While global initiatives such as the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) emphasize the importance of equipping learners with competencies necessary for success in life, work, and higher education, many educational settings still struggle to effectively incorporate these skills into classroom instruction (Kienzler et al., 2023). This gap often results in learners being academically prepared but lacking the practical skills required to navigate real-world situations.

In many Asian countries, the integration of life skills is hindered by systemic challenges such as the absence of standardized curricula, insufficient teacher training, and limited instructional resources. Despite the recognition of life skills as essential for lifelong learning, educational systems vary in how these competencies are delivered, with some treating them as supplementary rather than integral components of the curriculum (DeJaeghere & Murphy-Graham, 2021). Teachers often face difficulties in balancing academic demands with the need to develop learners' socio-emotional and practical skills (Elbertson et al., 2025). Additionally, disparities in access to resources and technology further limit opportunities for students, particularly in developing regions, to acquire essential life skills (Van De Werfhorst et al., 2022).

In the Philippine, teaching life skills beyond the four corners of the classroom presents similar challenges (Frianeza et al., 2024). Many teachers are primarily trained in content-based instruction, which limits their ability to effectively integrate life skills such as financial literacy, critical thinking, and emotional regulation into daily lessons (Palma-Luengo et al., 2025). Furthermore, large class sizes, heavy workloads, and the emphasis on standardized assessments often lead teachers to prioritize academic performance over holistic development (Kanwal et al., 2023).

In the local context, particularly in schools within Davao City, socioeconomic and technological disparities further affect the development of life skills among learners. Students in well-resourced schools have access to leadership programs, digital tools, and experiential learning opportunities, while those in rural or underprivileged areas encounter limitations in resources and support systems. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these inequalities, as remote learning environments exposed gaps in digital access and practical skill development. Based on the researcher's observations and informal conversations with teachers in the district, common concerns include the lack of structured materials, limited training opportunities, and challenges in integrating life skills into existing classroom practices.

Despite the growing body of literature on life skills education and 21st-century learning, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences of teachers in integrating life skills into classroom instruction. Existing studies often focus on policy frameworks or student outcomes, with limited exploration of teachers' actual experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights in implementing life skills education. This study addresses this gap by examining how teachers navigate the challenges of teaching life skills and how these experiences contribute to promoting lifelong learning among learners. The findings of this research offer valuable insights that may inform educational policies, teacher training programs, and instructional practices aimed at strengthening life skills education and enhancing holistic learner development.



Objectives of the Study

The study explored the perceived practices of teachers in teaching learners life skills necessary for success in their chosen path and for becoming lifelong learners. Specifically, it sought to:

1. describe the experiences of teachers in teaching learners life skills toward success in life.
2. identify the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in addressing challenges encountered in teaching learners life skills.
3. determine the educational insights that can be drawn from the experiences of teachers in teaching life skills and promoting lifelong learning among learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of public-school teachers in teaching learners life skills toward success. A descriptive qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed for a clear and detailed presentation of teachers' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights without manipulating variables or imposing assumptions.

The phenomenological approach enabled the researcher to understand how teachers interpret and give meaning to their roles in developing learners' life skills, such as problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, and resilience. This design provided rich descriptions of real classroom experiences, including challenges like limited resources, diverse learner needs, and low motivation, while emphasizing the essence of teaching life skills in authentic educational contexts.

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of ten (10) public-school teachers, with five (5) selected for in-depth interviews and five (5) for a focus group discussion. The number of participants was sufficient to generate rich and meaningful qualitative data. Informants were chosen from different schools to ensure diverse perspectives and teaching experiences.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants based on specific criteria: they must be licensed public-school teachers, actively teaching, have at least three years of experience, demonstrate involvement in life skills instruction, and be willing to participate. This ensured that all participants had relevant knowledge and direct experience in teaching learners life skills.

Sources of Data

The primary data sources were the narratives and responses of the teacher-informants gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. These narratives included their experiences, challenges, strategies, and insights in teaching life skills and preparing learners for real-life situations. Supporting data were collected through field notes and relevant documents, which captured observations, key ideas, emotional expressions, and recurring patterns during data collection. These additional sources enriched the contextual understanding and strengthened the analysis of participants' lived experiences.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses. The questions focused on teachers' experiences in developing learners' life skills, including communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and responsibility, as well as the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for probing and follow-up questions, enabling richer data collection. The instrument was validated by experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured permission from the appropriate academic and school authorities. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and procedures, and informed consent was obtained to ensure voluntary participation and ethical compliance.

Data were collected through scheduled interviews and a focus group discussion. With participants' consent, sessions were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. The recordings were transcribed verbatim, and responses in local languages were translated into English while preserving their original meaning. The data were then organized for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach combined with Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis. The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, followed by coding significant statements. These codes were grouped into themes reflecting recurring patterns in the data.

Themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to represent teachers' lived experiences. The researcher developed both textural descriptions (what was experienced) and structural descriptions (how it was experienced), which were synthesized to capture the essence of the phenomenon. This systematic approach ensured a comprehensive and meaningful interpretation of the data.



Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed to protect the rights, dignity, and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were used, and identifying information was removed to maintain anonymity. All data were stored securely, and the study adhered to the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participants were treated with respect throughout the process, and a supportive environment was maintained during data collection to ensure emotional safety.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured using Lincoln and Guba's criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement with the data.

Dependability and confirmability were established through an audit trail, reflexivity, and careful documentation of the research process. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Teachers' Experiences in Teaching Life Skills

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas
Real-World Relevance and Student Engagement	- Connecting lessons to real-life situations - Using practical examples - Increasing student participation
Lack of Structured Curriculum on Life Skills	- Absence of clear guidelines - Reliance on personal experience and online materials
Holistic Development through Life Skills	Development of values, emotional skills, responsibility, and learner independence

The first theme, Real-World Relevance and Student Engagement, shows that teachers observed greater learner interest when lessons were connected to real-life situations as participant 1 shared that:

Sa dihang gisugdan nako ang pagkonektar sa among mga leksyon sa tinuod nga kahimtang sa kinabuhi, sama sa pagtudlo sa Math pinaagi sa pag-budget, mas nahimong interesado ang akong mga estudyante.

(When I started connecting our lessons to real-life situations like teaching Math through budgeting, my students became more interested.)

In connection, participant 2 also emphasized that:

Ang life skills nakapahimo sa pagkat-on nga mas makahuluganon alang kanila, dili lang usa ka butang nga kinahanglan nilang pasarahon.,

(Life skills made learning more meaningful to them, not just something they needed to pass.)

The participants' responses highlight that connecting lessons to real-life situations significantly improves student engagement and learning motivation. Teachers observed that when learners see the practical application of what they are studying, such as budgeting or preparing for future careers, they become more interested and actively involved in the learning process. This aligns with the findings of Trani et al. (2025), which emphasize that contextualized learning enhances student. In addition, UNICEF (2022) emphasizes that contextualized learning enhances student engagement and promotes the development of practical competencies (Joshi et al., 2025).

The second theme, Lack of Structured Curriculum on Life Skills, highlights the challenges teachers face due to the absence of clear instructional guidelines. Participant 3 expressed this concern by stating:

Walay klaro nga giya kung unsaon pagtudlo sa life skills. Usahay mobati ko nga mura ra ko og nag-improvise.

(There is no clear guide on how to teach life skills. Sometimes I feel like I'm just improvising.)

In connection, Participant 4 also emphasized the need for institutional support:

Mas maayo unta kung naa mi structured modules o bisan training nga makagiya kanamo.

(It would be better if we had structured modules or even training to guide us.)

The participants' responses highlight that the lack of a structured curriculum leads to uncertainty and inconsistency in teaching life skills. This situation emphasizes the need for systematic support to ensure that life skills education is delivered consistently and meaningfully across classrooms. This finding is supported by Erbaş (2025), which stresses that life skills education should be guided by structured frameworks and clear instructional materials to ensure effective and consistent implementation.



The third theme, *Holistic Development through Life Skills*, reflects positive learner outcomes as teachers observed meaningful changes in students' behavior, attitudes, and overall development. Participant 3 shared that:

Pagkahuman nako og focus sa mga values sama sa respeto, responsibilidad, ug empathy, nakabantay ko og mga kausaban sa akong mga estudyante. Mas nahimo silang cooperative, ug ang uban nagsugod pa gani og tabang sa ilang mga classmates nga naglisod.

(After I started focusing on values like respect, responsibility, and empathy, I noticed changes in my students. They became more cooperative, and some even started helping their classmates who struggled.)

In connection, Participant 4 also emphasized that:

Sa dihang gisugdan nako ang pag-integrate sa mga leksyon bahin sa time management ug goal-setting, mas nahimo nga organized ug focused ang akong mga estudyante. Nagsugod sila og set sa ilang kaugalingong weekly targets ug nahimo silang accountable sa ilang kaugalingon.

(When I began integrating lessons on time management and goal-setting, my students became more organized and focused. They started setting their own weekly targets and became accountable.)

The participants' responses highlight that integrating life skills into instruction leads to improvements in students' cooperation, responsibility, self-discipline, and emotional awareness. Teachers observed that learners became more supportive of one another, more organized in their tasks, and more accountable for their actions. This finding aligns with the ideas that integrating life skills into teaching promotes holistic development, including social, emotional, and behavioral growth among learners (Hvalby et al., 2024). Similarly, teaching real-life competencies strengthens learners' adaptability, motivation, and long-term success in both academic and real-world contexts (Sibley et al., 2025).

Table 2
Coping Mechanisms of Teachers

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas
Integration of Life Skills in Daily Lessons	• Embedding life skills in regular subjects • use of role-play, storytelling, reflection
Peer Collaboration and Sharing of Best Practices	LAC sessions • idea sharing • collaborative learning among teachers

The first theme, *Integration of Life Skills in Daily Lessons*, reveals how teachers embed life skills in everyday instruction as participant 1 shared that:

Dako kaayo og tabang ang among LAC sessions. Nakakat-on ko og simple nga mga strategies gikan sa ubang teachers, sama sa paggamit og role plays ug reflection journals aron matudlo ang empathy ug self-awareness.

(Our LAC sessions helped a lot. I learned simple strategies from other teachers, such as using role plays and reflection journals to teach empathy and self-awareness.)

In connection, participant 2 also emphasized that:

Panahon sa among informal lunch breaks, usahay maghisgot mi kung unsang activities ang epektibo sa among klase. Usa ka teacher ang ni-share kung giunsa niya paggamit ang storytelling aron matudlo ang decision-making, ug gisulayan nako kini sa akong klase, epektibo gyud siya.

(During informal lunch breaks, we discuss effective activities. One teacher shared how she used storytelling to teach decision-making, and I tried it in my class, it was effective.)

The participants' responses highlight that teachers integrate life skills naturally into their daily lessons through strategies such as role-playing, storytelling, and reflection activities. According to Miglani et al. (2026), these approaches allow learners to experience real-life situations within the classroom while developing empathy, self-awareness, and decision-making skills. As emphasized by Jamil et al. (2024), embedding life skills in regular subjects, teachers are able to address both academic and personal development without requiring additional instructional time, making learning more meaningful and practical.

The second theme, *Peer Collaboration and Sharing of Best Practices*, highlights the importance of collaboration among teachers as participant 2 shared that:



Dako kaayo og tabang ang among LAC sessions. Nakakat-on ko og simple nga mga strategies gikan sa ubang teachers. Ang pag-share og ideas sa akong mga co-teachers nakahatag nako og confidence ug bag-ong mga tools.

(LAC sessions helped a lot. I learned simple strategies from other teachers. Sharing ideas with my co-teachers gave me confidence and new tools.)

In connection, participant 2 also emphasized the importance of group chat, saying that:

Nagsugod mi og group chat diin among gi-post ang mga ideas ug lesson plans para sa pagtudlo og values ug practical life skills. Dako gyud kaayo kini og tabang.

(We started a group chat where we post ideas and lesson plans for teaching values and practical life skills. It has been very helpful.)

The participants' responses highlight that collaboration among teachers plays a vital role in addressing the challenges of teaching life skills. Through LAC sessions, informal discussions, and digital communication platforms, teachers exchange strategies, resources, and experiences that enhance their instructional practices (Culajara, 2023). This collaborative environment not only promotes innovation but also builds teacher confidence and support systems (Abrenica et al., 2025).

The third theme, *Continuous Self-Improvement and Professional Development*, reflects teachers' proactive efforts to enhance their teaching practices as participant 1 shared that:

Ni-apil ko og free webinars panahon sa pandemic bahin sa SEL o Social Emotional Learning ug growth mindset. Nakatabang kini nako nga mas masabtan ang importansya sa life skills.

(I joined free webinars during the pandemic about Social Emotional Learning and growth mindset. These helped me understand the importance of life skills.)

In connection, another participant also emphasized that:

Nagsugod ko og follow sa education forums ug social media groups diin ang mga teachers nag-share og strategies sa pagtudlo og values ug life skills. Nahimo na kini nga habit nako ang pag-reflect sa akong practice ug pagsulay og bag-ong techniques.

(I began following education forums and social media groups where teachers share strategies in teaching values and life skills. It became a habit to reflect on my practice and try new techniques.)

The participants' responses highlight that teachers actively seek professional growth through webinars, online courses, reading materials, and virtual communities. Despite limited institutional support, they demonstrate initiative and commitment to improving their knowledge and teaching strategies. These coping strategies align with recent studies. These findings closely aligned with the ideas of Abakah (2023) which emphasize that teacher collaboration and continuous professional learning significantly improve instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. Similarly, Hung (2026) highlights that adaptive teachers who engage in professional learning communities are more capable of implementing innovative and responsive teaching strategies, especially in resource-constrained educational settings.

Table 3
Educational Insights from Teachers' Experiences

Emergent Themes	Core Ideas
Life Skills as Foundation for Lifelong Learning	• Life skills support real-world success, confidence, and resilience
Teacher Support and Training are Crucial	• Need for institutional support, training, and clear guidelines
Education Must Go Beyond Academics	• Importance of developing emotional, social, and practical competencies

The first theme, Life Skills as Foundation for Lifelong Learning, highlights the long-term impact of life skills as participant 1 shared that:

Importante ang academics, apan ang life skills gyud ang mas makapangandam sa mga estudyante alang sa kinabuhi.

(Academics are important, but life skills are what really prepare students for life.)

In connection, participant 2 also emphasized that:

Usa sa akong kanhi estudyante naglisod sa Math ug Science, apan dako kaayo siyag perseverance ug maayo nga communication skills, nakasugod siya sa iyang kaugalingong gamay nga negosyo.

(One of my former students struggled in Math and Science, but she had perseverance and strong communication skills, she eventually started her own small business.)



The participants' responses highlight that life skills such as perseverance, communication, and confidence are essential for learners' success beyond academic settings. Teachers observed that students who may not excel academically can still achieve success when equipped with strong life skills, demonstrating that education should extend beyond academic performance. These competencies empower learners to navigate real-world challenges, adapt to change, and pursue meaningful opportunities, reinforcing the value of life skills as a foundation for lifelong learning.

The second theme, Teacher Support and Training are Crucial, emphasizes the need for institutional backing as participant 4 shared that:

Nagtuo ko nga gusto sa tanang teachers nga motudlo og life skills, apan daghan ang wala kahibalo kung unsaon kini pagtudlo. Kinahanglan namo og klaro nga giya ug suporta gikan sa administrasyon.

(I believe all teachers want to teach life skills, but many do not know how. We need clear guidance and support from the administration.)

In connection, participant 5 also emphasized that:

Ang trainings, workshops, o bisan simple nga guidebook dako na kaayo og tabang aron mas epektibo namong ma-implement ang life skills.

(Trainings, workshops, or even a simple guidebook would greatly help us implement life skills effectively.)

The participants' responses highlight that while teachers recognize the importance of life skills education, they face challenges due to limited training and lack of structured support. Educators expressed the need for professional development, instructional materials, and institutional guidance to ensure consistent and effective implementation. Strengthening teacher capacity through training and support systems is essential in empowering educators to confidently deliver life skills instruction. This is supported by Kager et al. (2023), who emphasize that continuous professional development enhances teachers' ability to implement effective and meaningful instruction, particularly in areas beyond traditional academic content. Similarly, Nqabeni and Cishe (2023) stresses that structured training and institutional support are critical in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources to successfully integrate life skills into classroom practices.

The third theme, *Education Must Go Beyond Academics*, underscores the broader purpose of education as participant 4 shared that:

Usahay gilauman mi nga motudlo og values ug life skills, apan wala gyud mi matagaan og sako nga tools o panahon aron mabuhay kini og tarong.

(Sometimes we are expected to teach values and life skills, but we are not given the proper tools or time to do it effectively.)

In connection, participant 5 also emphasized that:

Kinahanglan sa mga teachers ang padayon ug focused nga professional development bahin niini nga area, labi na sa emotional intelligence o conflict resolution.

(Teachers need continuous and focused professional development, especially in areas like emotional intelligence and conflict resolution.)

The participants' responses highlight that education must address not only academic knowledge but also emotional, social, and behavioral development. Teachers emphasized that learners need guidance in values formation, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills to become well-rounded individuals. However, the lack of time, tools, and focused training limits their ability to fully integrate these aspects into teaching. These findings are supported by Shapiro et al. (2024), which emphasizes that education systems must prioritize life skills and social-emotional learning to address complex global demands. Similarly, Daher-Armache et al. (2025) identifies critical thinking, resilience, and collaboration as essential competencies that learners need for lifelong learning and future employability.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the study reveal that teaching life skills is a critical component of holistic education, enabling learners to develop not only academic competence but also essential personal and social skills necessary for success in life. Teachers demonstrated the ability to integrate life skills into their daily instruction by making lessons relevant, practical, and meaningful. However, their experiences also highlighted significant challenges, particularly the lack of a structured curriculum, insufficient training, and limited institutional support. Despite these challenges, teachers remained resourceful by adopting coping mechanisms such as collaboration with peers, integration of life skills across subjects, and continuous self-improvement. Overall, the study



confirms that life skills education enhances student engagement, promotes positive behavior, and prepares learners to become responsible, resilient, and lifelong learners.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that educational authorities develop a structured life skills curriculum supported by clear guidelines, modules, and assessment tools to ensure consistent implementation across schools. Schools should also provide continuous professional development programs, including training on social-emotional learning and practical teaching strategies, to strengthen teachers' capacity in delivering life skills instruction. Furthermore, school leaders are encouraged to foster a collaborative culture through Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and professional learning communities where teachers can share best practices and resources. Lastly, future researchers may explore the long-term impact of life skills education on learners' academic performance and real-world outcomes to further strengthen the integration of life skills in the educational system.

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