



Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers in Public Elementary Schools

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i11754>

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/130226>

Original Research Article

Received: 16/11/2024

Accepted: 18/01/2025

Published: 22/01/2025

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools in Talomo District, Division of Davao City. This employed the non-experimental quantitative research design utilizing correlational method leading to regression analysis. The respondents of the study were the 130 teachers in public elementary schools. The statistical tools used in this study were weighted mean, product moment correlation coefficient or (pearson r) and regression analysis. Based on the data, the academically challenging environment was oftentimes manifested while the passionate leadership qualities were perceived the same. There was significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers. On the other hand, there was significant influence between the academically challenging environment and passionate

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Cite as: Alagasi, Dionisia D., and Josephine B. Baguio. 2025. "Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers in Public Elementary Schools". *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies* 51 (1):355-64. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i11754>.

leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. In the light of the findings the study may guide the school administrators in articulating plans and school programs that will respond to the teachers' needs and aspirations. Thus, this could be the basis in developing strategies and formulating rules towards development of academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. In addition, this study may contribute to teachers teaching effectiveness and build a trusting and creative atmosphere that is conducive to the attainment of the goals of the organization.

Keywords: *Academically challenging environment; passionate leadership qualities; public elementary school; teachers; Philippines.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning can be seen as a cognitive development process where individuals actively construct systems of meaning and understanding about reality through interactions and experiences with their environments (Lemke, 2021). In this process, an academically challenging environment, combined with the passionate leadership qualities of teachers, is essential for fostering quality learning (Brandon, 2018). Effective teachers create an environment that encourages students to explore new ideas, take academic risks, and address challenges in their learning (Chew et al., 2021).

Classroom environments and academically rigorous settings are strongly linked to students' academic behaviors and growth (Herman et al., 2021). An academically challenging classroom provides learning activities with a rigorous instructional focus, clear procedural rules, and

opportunities for active participation. This approach contributes to an environment that fosters both student engagement and academic progress (Burden, 2020).

High performance expectations play a critical role in shaping teachers' instructional practices and are often reflected in their expectations for student performance. Teachers' perceptions and expectations help students set academic goals, creating an environment that encourages them to reach higher standards. These expectations significantly influence the academic success of students, as the beliefs teachers hold about their students' abilities to learn can either foster or hinder their learning experiences. When students perceive that their teachers have high expectations, they are more likely to engage deeply in their learning and believe that school can positively impact their futures (Conger et al., 2010; Carr, 2010).

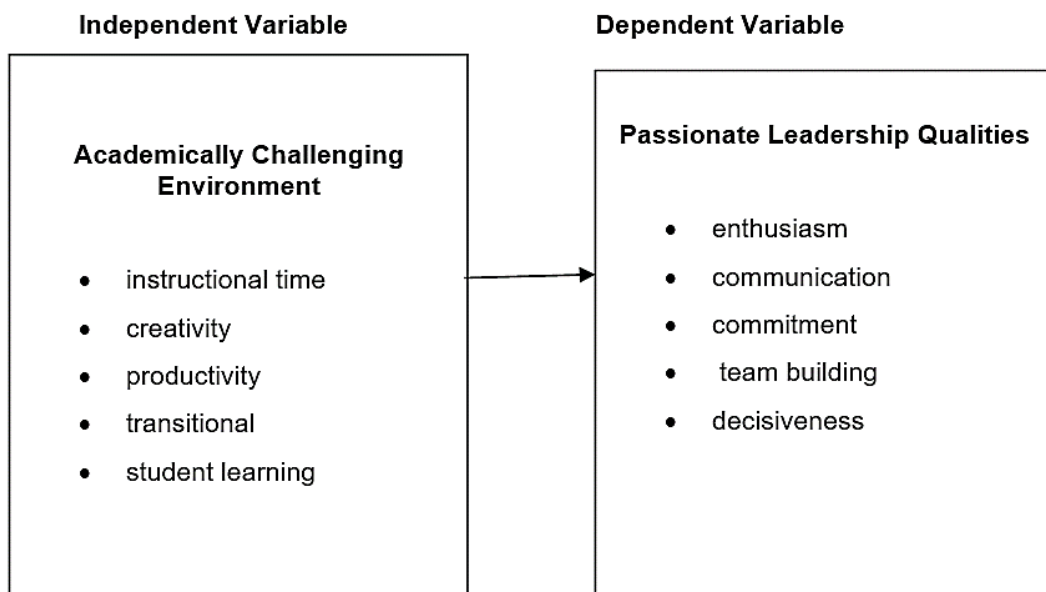


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Teacher expectations impact student achievement in several ways. Effective teachers establish academically challenging classrooms by optimizing instructional time, minimizing disruptions, facilitating smooth transitions, and taking responsibility for student learning. They set high (yet achievable) expectations for all students and provide the necessary support to help them meet these expectations (Conley, 2010). Teachers employ strategies such as effective questioning, promoting critical thinking, assigning challenging tasks, and incorporating engaging activities to enhance student participation and accountability, ultimately contributing to an academically stimulating environment and fostering passionate leadership qualities (Catherine, 2010).

This study aimed to determine the significant relationship between an academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities among teachers, focusing on how the characteristics of the learning environment can influence teachers' leadership behaviors. An academically challenging environment is typically marked by high expectations, rigorous academic tasks, and an atmosphere that encourages active participation and engagement. Passionate leadership qualities, on the other hand, refer to a teacher's enthusiasm, commitment, communication skills, and ability to foster teamwork, decisiveness, and overall leadership in the classroom.

By exploring these two variables, the study sought to understand if a positive and academically stimulating environment is associated with stronger leadership qualities in teachers. Teachers working in such an environment are expected to demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm, motivation, and commitment, which can positively affect their students' learning experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine whether these leadership qualities, in turn, influence the teachers' ability to manage classrooms effectively, motivate students, and promote academic success.

Through this investigation, the study hoped to provide valuable insights into how educators' working environments can enhance their leadership capabilities, ultimately leading to improved teaching practices and student outcomes. The findings could inform educational policies and practices, helping schools and administrators create environments that nurture

both academic rigor and passionate leadership, benefiting teachers, students, and the school community as a whole.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

Quantitative research is a systematic investigation of phenomena by gathering quantifiable data and performing statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques. Quantitative research collects information from existing and potential customers using sampling methods and sending out online surveys, online polls, questionnaires, etc., the results of which can be depicted in the form of numerical. After careful understanding of these numbers to predict the future of a product or service and make changes accordingly (Pregoner, 2024).

Researchers use this quantitative research design to correlate two or more variables using mathematical analysis methods. Patterns, relationships, and trends between variables are concluded as they exist in their original set up. The impact of one of these variables on the other is observed along with how it changes the relationship between the two variables. Researchers tend to manipulate one of the variables to attain the desired results. Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. It can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and generalize results to wider populations (Mohajan, 2020).

This study employed the non-experimental quantitative research design utilizing correlational method leading to regression analysis. This method measured the association of two variables with varying level of measurement. In certain cases, two variables become related because they are related to, or caused by another variable or variables. This method was used to determine the relationship between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools (Pregoner & Baguio, 2024).

2.2 Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were the 130 teachers in public elementary schools in Talomo District, Division of Davao City. They were considered as respondents because they serve

at least three years in public school and they were knowledgeable about the purpose of this study, wherein the researcher elicited the real data from them. This study used the universal sampling which means all the population of the study was considered as respondents. This was conducted in the school year 2022-2023.

2.3 Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study were designed to assess the level of the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. A self-made survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher, drawing on relevant studies and literature reviewed to ensure its relevance and alignment with the study's objectives. The questionnaire was modified to suit the specific context of this research and validated by a panel of three expert validators, each holding a Doctor of Education degree with a major in Educational Management.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 50 items, divided into 10 subscales. These items were crafted to effectively capture the nuances of the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities. A 5-point Likert scale was employed, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), to facilitate the quantification of respondents' perceptions and experiences.

Before the administration of the survey, the draft of the questionnaire underwent a rigorous process of face and content validation by the expert panel. Based on their feedback and suggestions, necessary revisions were made to improve the clarity, relevance, and overall quality of the instrument.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire was pilot-tested among school teachers in a separate school within the same district. This trial run allowed for the identification of any issues with the instrument's design and provided further insights into its effectiveness in measuring the targeted constructs. Adjustments were made based on the results of this test to refine the instrument and ensure that it accurately captured the data needed for the study.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were gathered following a structured procedure. First, the researcher

sought permission and endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School of Rizal Memorial Colleges, which was then forwarded to the Schools Division Superintendent for approval. Upon receiving the Dean's approval, a formal request letter was submitted to the office of the Schools Division Superintendent. After the Superintendent's approval, an endorsement letter was sent to the School Heads to further facilitate the study.

Subsequently, a schedule was arranged for the distribution of the test questionnaires for pilot testing, aimed at assessing the reliability and validity of the instrument. The questionnaires included an explanation of the study and detailed instructions for completing the tests. Following the pilot testing, the survey was distributed to the actual respondents. After collecting all the completed questionnaires, the researcher proceeded to retrieve and submit them for statistical analysis. The gathered data were then tallied, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted in alignment with the study's objectives.

2.5 Data Analysis

The gathered data were systematically classified, analyzed, and interpreted using several statistical tools. First, the Weighted Mean was employed to measure the level of the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. To determine the relationship between these two variables, the Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, or Pearson r , was utilized. Lastly, Regression Analysis was conducted to examine the influence of the academically challenging environment on the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Level of Academically Challenging Environment of Teachers

Table 1 presents the level of academically challenging environment experienced by teachers, with all items rated at a high level. The mean scores for each item indicate that teachers perceive the environment as highly conducive to academic challenge. The highest ratings were given to creativity (3.79) and productivity (3.80), reflecting the importance of fostering an innovative and productive environment. Instructional time (3.69) and transitions (3.71) were also rated highly, suggesting that the

organization of time and smooth transitions are integral to maintaining a challenging academic atmosphere. While student learning received the lowest score (3.48), it still falls within the high range, indicating that teachers consider student learning to be adequately supported in an academically challenging environment. The overall mean score of 3.69 indicates that, on the whole, the academically challenging environment in the classroom is perceived to be at a high level, supporting effective teaching and student engagement. This implies that teachers in these settings are working in an environment that encourages creativity, productivity, and effective use of instructional time, contributing to a dynamic and engaging academic atmosphere. However, it also suggests that there may still be room for further improvement in ensuring that student learning is maximized to the same extent as other factors.

This finding aligns with the study by Bean and Melzer (2021), in fostering student engagement and academic achievement. Their research showed that classrooms with a high level of academic challenge provide students with opportunities for deep learning and critical thinking, leading to better academic outcomes. The high ratings observed in this study for elements such as creativity, productivity, and instructional time suggest that teachers are effectively creating an environment that encourages active participation and intellectual growth, which positively impacts student learning.

Furthermore, this result is consistent with the work of Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018), who highlighted that an academically challenging environment promotes high expectations for both students and teachers. When teachers create such an environment, they not only challenge students but also model a strong commitment to academic excellence. The high mean scores in this study support these conclusions, indicating that teachers are succeeding in providing an academically stimulating environment that encourages student engagement and achievement, aligning with the broader goals of fostering a challenging and productive academic atmosphere.

3.2 Level of Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

Table 2 presents the level of passionate leadership qualities exhibited by teachers. The

mean scores for most items fall within the high range, with enthusiasm (3.62), communication (3.50), and commitment (3.40) being highly rated. These scores suggest that teachers display a strong sense of enthusiasm, effective communication, and commitment to their roles, which are key elements of passionate leadership. However, team building (3.22) and decisiveness (2.90) were rated at a moderate level, indicating that these aspects of leadership may require further attention and development. The overall mean score of 3.33 reflects that, on the whole, teachers demonstrate a moderate level of passionate leadership qualities. This implies that while teachers possess strong enthusiasm, communication, and commitment, there is an opportunity to enhance their leadership skills in areas such as team building and decisiveness. Strengthening these aspects could further empower teachers to lead more effectively, create stronger collaborative environments, and make more confident decisions that benefit their students and school community.

This finding is in line with the research of Amerstorfer and von Münster-Kistner (2021), which underscored the significance of passionate leadership qualities in driving both teacher effectiveness and student success. They highlighted that teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment, and effective communication significantly enhance the learning environment and encourage greater student participation. The high ratings in this study for enthusiasm, communication, and commitment suggest that teachers are displaying strong leadership qualities that inspire and motivate students, contributing to a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere.

Additionally, the results are consistent with the study of Espinosa and González (2023), who found that teachers with high passionate leadership qualities create classrooms where students feel supported, encouraged, and motivated to excel. This study's findings further support the idea that passionate leadership, as demonstrated by the teachers, is a key factor in fostering an environment conducive to both academic challenge and student engagement. The high mean scores in enthusiasm, communication, and commitment reflect teachers' strong leadership qualities, which are integral to cultivating a productive and motivated learning environment.

3.3 Significance on the Relationship Between Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

Table 3 presents the significance of the relationship between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers. The computed r-value of 0.633 indicates a high correlation between these two variables, suggesting a strong positive relationship. The p-value of 0.01 is less than the significance level of 0.05, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), which means that there is a statistically significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers. This implies that as the level of academically challenging environment increases, so does the level of passionate leadership qualities among teachers. The strong correlation suggests that effective leadership is integral to creating an environment that fosters academic challenge, and teachers who demonstrate passionate leadership qualities are likely to contribute to a more stimulating and engaging academic setting.

This finding is consistent with the study of Puspitadani et al., (2022), which emphasized the strong link between an academically challenging environment and the leadership qualities exhibited by teachers. Their research highlighted that when teachers foster an academically demanding environment—through structured lessons, clear expectations, and active student participation—their leadership qualities, such as enthusiasm, communication, and commitment, are also elevated. The significant relationship observed in this study supports the notion that a challenging academic environment nurtures and enhances teachers' leadership qualities, leading to improved engagement and student achievement.

Furthermore, the finding aligns with the work of Yalçinkaya et al. (2021), who argued that academically challenging classrooms, characterized by high expectations and rigorous instructional practices, provide a platform for teachers to display passionate leadership. They found that teachers in such environments are more likely to exhibit the qualities of commitment, decisiveness, and enthusiasm, which are key components of effective leadership. The

significant correlation found in this study reaffirms that a well-structured and challenging academic environment supports the development of passionate leadership qualities in teachers, thus contributing to a positive and productive learning atmosphere.

In addition, this finding resonates with the research of Öqvist and Malmström (2018), who stressed that teacher leadership qualities, including communication and decisiveness, are crucial in managing an academically challenging environment. Teachers who are able to maintain high academic standards and engage students in challenging tasks often exhibit stronger leadership behaviors, which directly impact their effectiveness and the overall learning experience. The significant relationship found in the present study further confirms that fostering an academically challenging environment can enhance teachers' leadership qualities, promoting both teacher effectiveness and student success.

3.4 Significant Influence of Academically Challenging Environment on Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

Table 4 illustrates the significant influence of the academically challenging environment on passionate leadership qualities of teachers. The regression sum of squares (56.400) represents the variation explained by the regression model, while the residual sum of squares (501.265) indicates the unexplained variation. The total sum of squares (543.065) is the total variation in the dependent variable (passionate leadership qualities). The degrees of freedom for the regression (1) and residual (39) are also provided. The mean square for the regression (57.600) is obtained by dividing the regression sum of squares by its degrees of freedom, and the mean square for the residual (12.6056) is calculated by dividing the residual sum of squares by its degrees of freedom.

The F-value of 0.690 indicates the ratio of the variance explained by the model to the unexplained variance. With a p-value of 0.00, which is less than the significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means there is a statistically significant influence of the academically challenging environment on passionate leadership qualities of teachers. This

implies that an academically challenging environment contributes to the development or enhancement of passionate leadership qualities in teachers, highlighting the importance of such an environment in fostering effective leadership within educational settings.

Table 1. Level of academically challenging environment of teachers

No	Items	Mean (x)	Descriptive Level
1.	instructional time	3.69	High
2.	creativity	3.79	High
3.	productivity	3.80	High
4.	transitional	3.71	High
5.	student learning	3.48	High
Overall		3.69	High

Table 2. Level of Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

No	Items	Mean (x)	Descriptive Level
1	enthusiasm	3.62	High
2	communication	3.50	High
3	Commitment	3.40	High
4	team building	3.22	Moderate
5	Decisiveness	2.90	Moderate
Overall		3.33	Moderate

Table 3. Significance on the Relationship Between Academically Challenging Environment and Passionate Leadership Qualities of Teachers

Variables	X	Y	r-value	Degree of Correlation	p-value	Decision (Ho)
Academically Challenging Environment	4.56		0.633	High Correlation	0.01	Rejected
Passionate Leadership Qualities		4.03				

Table 4. Significant influence of academically challenging environment on passionate leadership qualities of teachers

Model	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	56.400	1	57.600	.690	0.00
Residual Total	501.265	39	12.6056		
	543.065	40			

Academically Challenging Environment					
Passionate Leadership Qualities	(Indicators)	B	β	T	Sig.
instructional time	enthusiasm	-.077	-.058	-.505	.001
creativity	communication	.016	.014	.127	.000
productivity	commitment	-.219	-.207	-1.809	.000
transitional	team building	.165	.188	1.572	.000
student learning	decisiveness	.015	.013	.126	.000
R		.726			
R ²		.527			
F		.690			
ρ		.000			

This finding affirms the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2012), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation and personal growth. According to SDT, when teachers operate in an academically challenging environment, they experience enhanced competence through meeting high expectations, which, in turn, cultivates their leadership qualities. Teachers who feel more capable and supported in such environments are likely to develop a greater sense of ownership and passion in their leadership roles, which can lead to increased motivation and effectiveness.

Moreover, the result supports Transformational Leadership Theory by Bass (1995), which emphasizes that leaders who inspire and motivate others create a positive environment conducive to personal and professional growth. In an academically challenging environment, teachers who demonstrate transformational leadership qualities—such as enthusiasm, commitment, and effective communication—are more likely to foster a stimulating atmosphere that encourages both their own growth and that of their students. This theory aligns with the current findings, suggesting that a challenging academic environment can indeed enhance teachers' passion for leadership and their ability to positively influence others.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978), which posits that social interaction and collaborative learning within a dynamic environment contribute significantly to cognitive and professional development. The academically challenging environment provides teachers with opportunities to collaborate, reflect, and grow in their leadership roles. Teachers who thrive in such an environment are more likely to exhibit passionate leadership qualities as they engage in ongoing professional development and peer interactions, enhancing both their leadership effectiveness and teaching practices.

4. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the forgoing findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

The level of the academically challenging environment in terms of instructional time, creativity, productivity, transitional and student learning is described as high. This means that the academically challenging environment is

highly manifested by the teachers. This signifies that teachers are creating a student-centered academic environment in which teaching and learning occur at high levels and students are self-directed learners. Active engagement learners are directly involved in actions that support cognition and intentional learning.

The level of passionate leadership qualities in terms of enthusiasm, communication, commitment, team building and decisiveness is described as moderate. This means that the level of passionate leadership qualities is sometimes manifested by the teachers. This signifies that passionate leadership qualities in terms of enthusiasm, communication, commitment, team building and decisiveness are moving beyond blame and befuddlement and working to transform themselves and their schools to serve all their students more passionately concerned and interested.

There is significant relationship between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the higher the result of academically challenging environment in public elementary schools, the better passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools.

There is significant influence between the academically challenging environment and passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the higher the result of academically challenging environment in public elementary schools, the better passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

The Department of Education (DepEd) should foster a strong collaborative effort to prevent potential conflicts within their respective organizations. Proactive strategies should be implemented to address any issues that may arise, ensuring a harmonious work environment.

This study may serve as a foundation for enhancing and refining DepEd procedures and

guidelines aimed at improving both the academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers in public elementary schools. It can offer valuable insights into the types of programs and activities that need to be developed and applied to motivate and strengthen the hidden curriculum, while also embracing the diversity in educational leadership among teachers.

The findings of this study can guide school administrators in crafting plans and school programs that address the specific needs and aspirations of teachers. By focusing on the results of this study, administrators can develop strategies and establish rules that foster the growth of an academically challenging environment and cultivate passionate leadership qualities among teachers.

Additionally, this study will contribute to enhancing teaching effectiveness, helping administrators create a trusting and creative atmosphere that supports the achievement of the institution's goals. By focusing on the development of an academically challenging environment and the passionate leadership qualities of teachers, schools can create a more dynamic and supportive learning space for both educators and students.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

The author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies have been used during the writing and editing of this manuscript. The details of the AI usage are as follows:

1. Grammarly: Used for grammar and spell-checking, as well as suggestions for improving sentence structure and overall clarity.
2. Quillbot: Employed for paraphrasing and refining sentence flow to enhance readability and coherence.

CONSENT

This quantitative study followed stringent ethical protocols to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and they were fully informed about the study's goals and the steps taken to ensure their privacy. To maintain anonymity, no personally identifiable information was gathered,

and each participant was assigned a unique code for analysis. All collected data were securely stored on encrypted servers, with access restricted to the research team. The results were presented in an aggregated format, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to any specific participant. Additionally, statistical analyses were performed in a way that preserved the confidentiality of the respondents, ensuring their privacy throughout the entire research process.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The data for this study were gathered following a structured procedure. First, the researcher sought permission and endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School of Rizal Memorial Colleges, which was then forwarded to the Schools Division Superintendent for approval. Upon receiving the Dean's approval, a formal request letter was submitted to the office of the Schools Division Superintendent. After the Superintendent's approval, an endorsement letter was sent to the School Heads to further facilitate the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:

<https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/130226>