

"EMPTY WALLS, OPEN MINDS ": TEACHERS' LEVEL OF ACCEPTANCE AND IMPACT OF DepEd ORDER NO. 21 SERIES OF 2023

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the level of acceptance and perceived impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among selected public elementary teachers in Balayan, Batangas, focusing on its influence on teaching practices and pupil learning. The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-method approach, beginning with a quantitative survey and followed by qualitative interviews. The participants consisted of 30 teachers from public elementary schools that participated in the Brigada Eskwela program. The results revealed that teachers generally accepted the policy, recognizing its objectives of promoting cleaner, more organized classrooms conducive to learning. However, challenges related to the removal of visual aids, particularly for younger students, were noted. Teachers experienced minimal disruption in their teaching practices, with some reporting positive effects on classroom management and material organization. While the policy improved pupil engagement by reducing distractions, it also highlighted the need for alternative strategies to support memory retention. The study found no significant differences in acceptance based on demographic factors, suggesting a uniform perception across age, gender, and years of service. Recommendations for improving the implementation of the DepEd Order include providing additional resources, professional development, and feedback mechanisms to support teachers and address logistical challenges. The study contributes to the understanding of the practical implications of DepEd Order No. 21 and offers insights for enhancing its impact on educational practices and outcomes.

Keywords: *DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023, Brigada Eskwela Level of Acceptance, Teaching Practices, Student's Learning*

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INTRODUCTION

"Empty Walls, Open Minds" outlined the DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023: Brigada Eskwela Implementing Guidelines, which were implemented from August 14–19, 2023. Under this order, schools identified and addressed their maintenance needs for classrooms, grounds, and other facilities. Additionally, the directive promoted a clean learning environment, requiring schools to remove all non-essential wall decorations, including visual instructions or classroom announcements, to create a distraction-free learning space. This policy aimed to maintain a clean and spacious environment where surfaces were free from dust, dirt, and grime, with enough space to move around comfortably. It sought to ensure that areas did not feel cramped or overcrowded, thereby enhancing pupil focus and engagement.

Understanding the level of acceptance this policy received from teachers and its impact on their teaching practices and pupils' academic progress was crucial. This study explored how teachers adapted to these changes and evaluated the policy's benefits and challenges for both teachers and pupils. Ultimately, the policy sought to prepare educators with open minds and improve the overall educational experience.

The classroom environment was considered essential for maximizing learning experiences for young children. While exposure to various visual materials could enhance engagement and focus, an overly decorated environment often detracted from the learning process. Visual materials helped keep pupils alert and made the learning environment more interesting, comprehensible, and structured. This also involved enforcing classroom rules, modeling, and supporting behavior regulation, which enhanced discipline and order. Akomolafe and Adesua (2015) argued that the classroom environment could either motivate or hinder pupils' learning, highlighting the need for balance. Therefore, classroom decorations played a significant role in effective classroom management by providing an engaging yet orderly learning space.

Bonghanoy et al. (2024) observed that classroom decorations served functional purposes beyond aesthetics, creating an engaging and stimulating learning environment. Pupils perceived these decorations as sources of inspiration. A 2022 study by Smith et al. found that well-designed classroom decorations significantly impacted pupils' minds, providing memorable learning experiences. This study revealed that such decorations could boost pupils' concentration and learning levels by 16%, making the learning process more engaging for both pupils and teachers.

Furthermore, Brigada Eskwela, launched nationwide in 2003, epitomized the voluntary collaboration among educators, parents, and communities to improve public school facilities. This initiative, which involved the cleaning and maintenance of school infrastructure, aimed to ensure optimal conditions for the academic year. Brigada Eskwela underscored the pivotal role of community engagement in enhancing educational infrastructure and nurturing a conducive learning environment, aligning with the objectives of DepEd Order No. 21 to create distraction-free classrooms. DepEd Order No. 21 was supported by Brigada Eskwela as school structures were improved through community participation, and appropriate maintenance plans were boosted, making the learning environment more conducive. This strategic partnership supported the overall objective of enhancing the management and advancement of public school facilities.

Brigada Eskwela also extended to classroom decoration, allowing educators to tailor learning environments to their teaching methodologies and pupils' preferences. Teachers played a crucial role in school operations, collaborating with administrators to create spaces that fostered academic achievement. However, as Tucker (2022) noted, excessive

decorations could become distractions, hindering pupils' learning. Therefore, it was essential for teachers to carefully select classroom decorations to balance engagement and focus.

Existing research discussed the advantages and implementation strategies of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023. However, a notable gap remained in understanding the extent of teachers' acceptance and the impact of this directive. Del Rosario (2023) highlighted disadvantages, such as second-grade pupils struggling with cursive writing without reference posters. This study aimed to determine the demographic profile of the respondents, assess the level of acceptance and impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023 on their teaching practices and pupils' learning, and determine if there was a significant difference between the demographic profile and level of acceptance. Based on these findings, a plan of action was proposed.

The study also evaluated the acceptance and impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023 on schools that won the Brigada Eskwela Award, including Balayan East Central School, Canda Integrated School, Sucol Elementary School, Poooc Elementary School, Cepriana Ascue Memorial Elementary School, Baclaran Elementary School in Balayan, Batangas, and Gregorio Paradero Elementary School in Tuy, Batangas. Since this study was conducted, Brigada Eskwela winners could review the findings to understand how this DepEd order improved teachers' practices and students' learning, as well as how much they embraced this initiative.

Objectives

This study aims to identify the level of acceptance and impact of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 among the teachers of the selected public elementary schools around the municipalities of Balayan and Tuy, Batangas.

1. What is the demographic profile of the selected public elementary teachers in terms of
 - 1.1 Age
 - 1.2. Gender
 - 1.3 Years of Service
2. What is the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 among the selected public elementary teachers?
3. What are the perceived impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on teaching practices and pupils' learning among the selected public elementary teachers?
4. Is there a significant difference on the level of acceptance and demographic profile of the respondents?
5. Based on the findings, what action plan can be proposed to enhance the acceptance and implementation of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among teachers?

METHODS

Research Design

To identify the level of acceptance of teachers from selected public elementary schools regarding DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 and its impact, this study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed method. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding by first quantifying acceptance levels and then exploring the reasons behind these levels through qualitative insights. The explanatory sequential mixed method approach involved two distinct research cycles: the first phase, quantitative research, measured the acceptance levels through a structured survey distributed to a sample of 30 teachers. The survey included Likert-scale questions to assess levels of acceptance and perceived impact, and the data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and differences among demographic

groups. In Phase 2, the qualitative research method was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the teachers' acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023. A semi-structured questionnaire was distributed to gather qualitative data on teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the removal of classroom decorations, allowing for rich insights into the motivations and concerns behind their acceptance levels. This qualitative approach aimed to uncover the reasons behind the quantitative findings, providing insights into the teachers' acceptance levels and the impact of the order.

Population and Sampling

This study included a total of thirty (30) respondents: thirty (30) teachers evenly distributed by gender (15 male and 15 female) from public schools, and an additional six (6) participants, also evenly distributed by gender (3 male and 3 female), who were selected for in-depth qualitative interviews. These individuals were current teachers from selected public schools in Balayan, Batangas, for the academic year 2023-2024. These schools were chosen due to their participation in the Brigada Eskwela program, which aligned with the study's focus on teachers' acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023. The researchers employed purposive sampling in both phases of the study to select respondents who met specific criteria: being a public elementary teacher in a school that had won the Brigada Eskwela award, regardless of the year of victory, and demonstrating compliance with the competition's requirements. As stated by Patton (2015), purposive sampling "involves the deliberate choice of particular cases or types of cases that will best contribute to the researcher's understanding of the research issue." In this study, purposive sampling allowed for the selection of teachers with relevant experiences and qualifications, ensuring that the findings provided valuable insights into the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.

Instrumentations

In the quantitative phase of the study, the researchers utilized validated survey questionnaires designed specifically for this study to collect data from respondents. The survey employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," to measure respondents' levels of acceptance and perceived impact of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023. In the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview approach was used to gather in-depth data from participants regarding their acceptance and the impacts of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable setting, allowing participants to share their thoughts openly. This method, as noted by Tetan (2022), combined predetermined questions with open-ended discussion, providing flexibility while ensuring key topics were covered.

Data Collection

To achieve the study's objectives, the following procedures were followed: First, the researchers requested formal permission from the school administration to conduct the data-gathering process. This involved writing an official letter to the directress/dean of Immaculate Conception College of Balayan Inc., seeking approval to conduct research at the identified schools. The letter also reaffirmed the researchers' adherence to ethical research standards and, most importantly, assured data security. Once permission was granted, the researchers conducted a pre-survey to identify a suitable location based on specific criteria, such as finding a public elementary school that had received the Brigada Eskwela award. Based on the findings, the researchers selected seven schools: Balayan East Central School, Canda Integrated School, Sucol Elementary School, Poooc Elementary School, Cepriana Ascue Memorial Elementary School, Baclaran Elementary School in Balayan, Batangas, and Gregorio Paradero Elementary School in Tuy, Batangas. Additionally, formal letters were addressed to each school selected for the research study to seek permission from the

school principals. These letters outlined the study's objectives, the method of conducting the study, and the ethical considerations, requesting permission from the principals to conduct the research at their respective schools.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized statistical tools and thematic analysis to accurately interpret the gathered data. For SOP 1, percentage was used to identify the demographic profile of respondents based on their gender, age, and years of service to determine the total distribution of the participants. For SOP 2, a weighted mean was employed to measure the extent of teachers' acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023. This statistical technique considered both the frequencies and values of the data points, providing a nuanced perspective on how the level of acceptance varied with the respondents' demographic profiles. Additionally, for SOP 3, a semi-structured interview was used to identify the perceived impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on teaching practices and pupil learning among the selected public elementary teachers. The interview was based on the quantitative data gathered to support the public elementary teachers on the DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze and interpret the identified themes in the context that categorized and represented the phenomenon of interest (**Creswell, 2014**). Moreover, for SOP 4, the Kruskal-Wallis Test was used to determine if there were significant differences in the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, across age, gender, and years of service. The Kruskal-Wallis H test (sometimes also called the "one-way ANOVA on ranks") was a rank-based nonparametric test used to determine if there were statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable. It was considered the nonparametric alternative to the one-way ANOVA, and an extension of the Mann-Whitney U test to allow the comparison of more than two independent groups.

Ethical Considerations

As part of the ethical considerations for this study, ensuring the study was conducted in an ethically appropriate manner was a primary concern. To achieve this, several steps were taken: letters outlining the study's objectives, methods, and ethical safeguards were submitted to the college dean for approval, ensuring alignment with institutional standards and policies. Moreover, the research process was explained in detail to the respondents and participants, covering the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations for them. All data collected from respondents/participants was kept strictly confidential. The researchers utilized alphanumeric codes (Respondents 1, 2, 3, etc./ Participants 1, 2, 3, etc.) to organize information. Implementing these measures, the researchers ensured that the study upheld the highest ethical standards, protecting the dignity and rights of all respondents/participants while maintaining the integrity of the research process.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Table 1

Demographic Profile Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	15	50%
Female	15	50%
Total	30	100%

The demographic profile based on gender for this study reveals a balanced distribution among the respondents, consisting of 30 individuals in total. As shown in Table 1, there are 15 females (50%) and 15 males (50%), indicating equal gender representation. This balanced distribution is significant as it provides an opportunity to analyze potential differences in experiences, attitudes, and responses between male and female respondents. The equal representation enhances the study's reliability and offers a balanced perspective for analysis, suggesting that gender does not skew the results. Moreover, as noted by Granton et al. (2024), a gender-balanced sample enables a deeper understanding of how different genders may interact with the gathered data, potentially revealing underlying patterns that are not biased by the overrepresentation of one gender. This indicates that a balanced gender sample, such as 50% male and 50% female respondents, improves the study's reliability and provides more accurate insights into gender differences. Overall, this demographic profile supports a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

Table 2

Demographic Profile Based on Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29 years old	5	17%
30-39 years old	14	47%
40-49 years old	10	33%
50-59 years old	1	3%
Total	30	100%

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of 30 respondents by age. The data indicate that most respondents are in the 30-39 age group, totaling 14 individuals (47%). This is followed by the 40-49 age group, which includes 10 respondents (33%). Additionally, the 20-29 age group has 5 respondents (17%), while the 50-59 age group has the lowest representation, with only 1 respondent (3%).

The age distribution reflects a predominantly middle-aged sample, with a significant concentration of respondents in their thirties and forties. This demographic profile may influence the study's findings, as the experiences and perspectives of individuals in this age range can differ significantly from those of younger or older respondents. According to research by Lachman et al. (2023) from the Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) study, middle-aged individuals often navigate complex roles, such as balancing caregiving responsibilities for children and aging parents while maintaining careers. These roles significantly shape their decision-making processes and viewpoints, reflecting the unique challenges and opportunities of this life stage. Therefore, these data provide valuable context for analyzing the research topic and emphasize the importance of considering demographic dynamics when interpreting the study's results.

Table 3

Demographic Profile Based on Years of Service

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	2	7%
1-5 years	8	27%
6-10 years	10	33%
11-15 years	4	13%
16-20 years	4	13%
More than 20 years	2	7%
Total	30	100%

Table 3 presents the demographic profile based on years of service among the 30 participants in the study. The data indicates that a significant portion of the respondents, 10 individuals (33%), have 6-10 years of service experience, making this the largest group. Following closely are those with 1-5 years of experience, comprising 8 participants (27%). Participants with 11-15 years and 16-20 years of service each represent 4 individuals (13%). The groups with less than 1 year and more than 20 years of service have the least representation, with 2 participants (7%) each. This distribution suggests a predominance of respondents with moderate experience in their roles, indicating that the insights gathered likely reflect the perspectives of individuals who have spent a substantial amount of time in their positions. Research shows that years of service often correlate with greater professional engagement and unique perspectives on the workplace environment (Guzzo et al., 2022). Furthermore, a study conducted from 2019 to 2021 found that demographic factors, such as years of service, significantly shape perspectives and behaviors, influencing engagement levels and performance among participants (El Refae et al., 2021). This study also examined how perceptions and beliefs evolve over time, shaped by participants' experiences and length of service.

Table 4

Level of Acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among Selected Public Elementary Teachers

Indicators/ Statements	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. I fully understand the objectives of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.63	Strongly Agree	2
2. I am aware of the requirements outlined in DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.60	Strongly Agree	3
3. I agree with the rationale behind removing unnecessary wall decorations under the DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.50	Strongly Agree	6.5
4. I support the goal of creating a clean and spacious classroom environment as mandated on the DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.67	Strongly Agree	1
5. I view the changes required mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 with positivity.	4.53	Strongly Agree	5
6. I have willingly adjusted my classroom setup to comply with DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.57	Strongly Agree	4
7. I find it manageable to adapt my teaching practices in line with DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.33	Strongly Agree	11
8. I am comfortable with the changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.37	Strongly Agree	9.5
9. I feel supported by the school administration in implementing DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.37	Strongly Agree	9.5
10. I believe I have everything I need to comply with the DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 requirements.	4.47	Strongly Agree	8
11. I think ongoing support is essential for the successful implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.50	Strongly Agree	6.5
General Weighted Mean	4.5	Strongly Agree	

Table 4 presents the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among selected public elementary teachers, ranked from the lowest to the highest weighted mean.

Beginning with the lowest mean, the statement "I find it manageable to adapt my teaching practices in line with DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" received a weighted mean of 4.33, placing it at rank 11. This result indicates that teachers may face challenges in adapting their teaching practices to align with the new directive, suggesting a need for additional support and resources. (Du Plessis & Küng, 2024) state that teachers are increasingly expected to adjust quickly to the complex demands of modern classrooms, which are influenced by shifting policies and diverse pupil needs. In contrast, the statements "I am comfortable with the changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" and "I feel supported by the school administration in implementing DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" both

received a mean of 4.37, ranking them at 9.5. This suggests that while some teachers express comfort with the changes, there may be a perceived lack of administrative support, which could negatively impact their overall acceptance of the policy.

Furthermore, the statement "I believe I have everything I need to comply with the DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 requirements" ranks 8th with a mean of 4.47. This indicates that, although most teachers feel generally equipped to meet the requirements, concerns regarding the availability of resources may still exist. Moving up the rankings, the statement "I think ongoing support is essential for the successful implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" shares a weighted mean of 4.50, tying at rank 6.5 with "I agree with the rationale behind removing unnecessary wall decorations under the DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023." This finding demonstrates a strong alignment with the objectives of the order and highlights the importance of continuous support for effective implementation.

Next, the statement "I view the changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 with positivity" ranks 5th with a mean of 4.53. This reflects a generally positive outlook among teachers toward the mandated changes, indicating openness to adaptation. At rank 4, the statement, "I have willingly adjusted my classroom setup to comply with DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023," received a mean of 4.57, indicating teachers' proactive efforts to meet the new requirements. According to Bernales et al. (2024), teachers in Cebu actively adjusted their classroom, removing unnecessary decorations and maintaining an organized environment to align with DepEd directives. This demonstrates their commitment to the order's objectives. Moreover, the statement "I am aware of the requirements outlined in DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" ranks 3rd with a mean of 4.60. This finding indicates that teachers possess a strong comprehension of the order's objectives, which is essential for effective implementation and acceptance.

Ranked 2nd, the statement "I fully understand the objectives of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" has a weighted mean of 4.63. This reflects a robust acceptance of the policy's goals, showing that teachers are committed to fostering a conducive learning environment. Additionally, Margaret Dawson-Amoah et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of understanding the various facets of the education policy making process, which is essential for effective implementation and acceptance of new educational policies. Finally, the statement "I support the goal of creating a clean and spacious classroom environment as mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023" received a mean of 4.67, ranking it at the top. This finding underscores that teachers are well-informed about the specifics of the order, thereby reinforcing their overall acceptance.

In conclusion, while there is a general positive acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, with teachers expressing strong support for its objectives, there are identifiable areas requiring improvement. Specifically, challenges remain in adapting teaching practices and ensuring adequate support from school administration. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for enhancing the implementation and effectiveness of the new policy in the classroom.

Table 5

Perceived Impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on Teaching Practices and pupil Learning among Selected Public Elementary Teachers

Indicators/ Statements	Weighted Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The removal of wall decorations has resulted in a cleaner and more organized classroom environment.	4.67	Strongly Agree	2
2. The removal of wall decorations has made the classroom appear more spacious.	4.73	Strongly Agree	1
3. The removal of wall decorations created a more conducive learning environment.	4.43	Strongly Agree	5
4. The changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 have made my teaching practices more focused on pupil's learning.	4.43	Strongly Agree	5
5. I spend less time managing classroom decorations and more time on instructional activities.	4.63	Strongly Agree	3
6. pupils appear to be more focused during lessons without the distraction of wall decorations.	4.4	Strongly Agree	7
7. pupils' engagement has improved as a result of the new classroom environment.	4.23	Strongly Agree	11.5
8. pupils have shown improved behavior since the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.00	Agree	14
9. I have had to develop new instructional materials to replace the wall decorations.	4.23	Strongly Agree	11.5
10. The lack of visual aids on the walls has required me to use more interactive teaching methods.	4.33	Strongly Agree	9
11. The changes have encouraged me to use more technology-based resources in my teaching.	4.43	Strongly Agree	5
12. In order to adjust to the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023, I have obtained sufficient professional development.	4.2	Strongly Agree	13
13. The school administration has provided sufficient support on the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.3	Strongly Agree	10
14. Ongoing support and training are essential to fully realize the benefits of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023.	4.37	Strongly Agree	8
General Weighted Mean	4.38	Strongly Agree	

Table 5 provides insights into the perceived impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on teaching practices and pupil learning among selected public elementary teachers, ranked from the lowest to the highest weighted mean.

Starting with the lowest ranked statement, “pupils have shown improved behavior since the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023”, which received a weighted mean of 4.00, ranked at 14. This indicates a perception that the order has not significantly influenced pupil behavior, suggesting that additional measures may be needed to foster behavioral improvements in the classroom. A minimalist classroom design encourages pupils to rely less on external stimuli for information and inspiration. Instead, they are encouraged to develop their critical thinking skills by actively engaging with course materials and collaborating with peers to solve problems (Tubo, 2023).

Following closely, the statement “In order to adjust to the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023, I have obtained sufficient professional development” ranked 13th with a mean of 4.20. This reflects a moderate agreement among teachers regarding their professional development related to the new directives, highlighting a potential area for enhancement in providing adequate training. In order to allay these worries, a balanced strategy that weighs the advantages and disadvantages of a bare-wall classroom policy is needed. Llego (2023) wrote that skepticism can be reduced and a positive learning environment can be promoted by giving teachers the assistance, tools, and training they need to carry out the policy successfully while attending to their concerns. Increased support and buy-in for the policy can also be achieved by including teachers in the decision-making process and allowing for flexibility and modification depending on unique teaching styles and classroom dynamics. The next two statements, “pupils’ engagement has improved as a result of the new classroom environment” and “I have had to develop new instructional materials to replace the wall decorations,” both hold a mean of 4.23, placing them at rank 11.5. This dual ranking indicates that while some teachers perceive an improvement in pupil engagement, they also face challenges in adapting instructional materials, suggesting a need for resource development to facilitate this transition. Pupils reported increased focus, participation, and a better learning experience in a minimalist classroom. This demonstrates that fewer decorations reduce distractions and create a calmer learning environment. Educators are encouraged to examine the aspects of their classroom regularly and make any necessary changes to maintain an extensive learning environment (Bonghanoy 2024).

Ranked 10th, the statement “The school administration has provided sufficient support on the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023” received a mean of 4.30. This score suggests that teachers feel there may be gaps in administrative support, which could impact their ability to implement the changes effectively. Moving on, the statement “The lack of visual aids on the walls has required me to use more interactive teaching methods” received a weighted mean of 4.33, placing it at rank 9. This indicates that teachers are adapting their teaching strategies in response to the removal of visual aids, fostering a shift toward more engaging methods of instruction.

At rank 8, the statement “Ongoing support and training are essential to fully realize the benefits of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023” has a mean of 4.37. This emphasizes the teachers’ recognition of the necessity for continuous support and training to optimize the implementation of the order’s directives. Additionally, the study reveals a positive outlook on teachers’ challenges and insights, with high levels of satisfaction reported in both work and personal life dimensions. This underscores the importance of fostering supportive work environments and promoting holistic well-being initiatives for educators. The findings emphasize the interconnected nature of challenges faced by teachers and the need for comprehensive strategies to enhance their professional satisfaction and effectiveness.

(Mahisay, 2024). The statement “pupils appear to be more focused during lessons without the distraction of wall decorations” ranks 7th with a mean of 4.40. This finding suggests that teachers have observed an improvement in pupil focus, attributing it to the reduced distractions in the learning environment. Teachers may find that with fewer visual distractions, pupils are better able to focus on the lesson material and tasks at hand. This can lead to improved concentration and academic performance (Garcia, 2024).

Both “The removal of wall decorations created a more conducive learning environment,” “The changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 have made my teaching practices more focused on pupils’ learning,” and “The changes have encouraged me to use more technology-based resources in my teaching” all share a mean of 4.43, placing them at rank 5. This indicates that teachers perceive a significant positive impact on the learning environment and their teaching practices, promoting a focus on pupil learning and technological integration. Research by Williams et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of incorporating technology and interactive elements into classroom design to enhance engagement and satisfaction among teachers. Ranked 3rd, the statement “I spend less time managing classroom decorations and more time on instructional activities” received a mean of 4.63. This finding demonstrates that teachers feel more time-efficient in their instructional activities due to the removal of classroom decorations, which may lead to enhanced teaching effectiveness. The transcriptions of teachers’ insights collaborated with the concept of Garcia (2023) “Cluttered classroom walls can contribute to a chaotic learning environment, making it more challenging for teachers to maintain order and manage pupil behavior. With bare walls, teachers have greater control over classroom organization and can more effectively facilitate learning activities.”

At rank 2, the statement “The removal of wall decorations has resulted in a cleaner and more organized classroom environment” has a weighted mean of 4.67. This indicates strong agreement among teachers regarding the benefits of a cleaner and more organized classroom, suggesting that the order has effectively contributed to a positive learning environment. Implementing a bare-walls classroom policy can be motivated by several educational reasons. It reduced distractions. Classroom walls filled with decorations, posters, and artwork can create visual clutter that distracts pupils from focusing on lesson content. By minimizing visual distractions, pupils can better concentrate on learning tasks and teacher instruction (Santos, 2023). Finally, the statement “The removal of wall decorations has made the classroom appear more spacious” ranks 1st with the highest mean of 4.73. This underscores the overwhelming consensus among teachers that the physical changes brought about by the order have significantly enhanced the spatial quality of their classrooms, contributing to a more conducive teaching and learning atmosphere. A recent body of research supports the idea that removing excessive wall decorations in classrooms can create a more spacious and effective learning environment (Bonghanoy, 2024).

In summary, the perceived impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, reveal a generally positive outlook among teachers regarding its effects on teaching practices and pupil learning. However, certain areas, such as administrative support and professional development, require attention to fully realize the benefits of the new directive. Addressing these gaps will be essential for maximizing the effectiveness of the order in enhancing educational outcomes.

Table 6

Significant Difference Based on Gender

Independent Sample T-Test Mann-Whitney U (Gender)				Description	Decision on Ho
		df	p		
Level of Acceptance	pupil's t	28	0.231	No Significant	Accept
	Mann-Whitney U		0.224	No Significant	Accept

The Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the levels of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023 between male and female respondents. The U statistic was 83.0, with a p-value of 0.224. Since the p-value is greater than the common significance level of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the level of acceptance between male and female respondents. Contrary to the study of Estrada et al., (2021) particularly in fields like health and sexuality education, where gender is strongly influenced by cultural and social norms, these research demonstrate how gendered expectancies might influence the acceptance of educational interventions.

Table 7

Significant Difference Based on Age

One-Way ANOVA (Non-parametric) Kruskal-Wallis (Age)					Description	Decision on Ho
Level of Acceptance	χ^2	Df	p	ϵ^2	No Significant	Accept
	2.08	3	0.556	0.0718	No Significant	Accept

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, across four age groups. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a statistical test used to compare two or more groups for a continuous or discrete variable. It is a non-parametric test, meaning that it assumes no particular distribution of your data and is analogous to the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The Kruskal Wallis test is sometimes referred to as the one-way ANOVA on ranks or the Kruskal Wallis one-way ANOVA (E.McClenaghan 2024). The results showed no statistically significant difference between the groups, $p = 0.556$. This indicates that age does not have a significant impact on the level of acceptance. Additionally, the effect size was small ($\epsilon^2 = 0.0718$), suggesting that the differences between the groups were minimal. Therefore, we can conclude that the acceptance of the order is similar across all age groups.

Table

Significant Difference Based on Length of Service

One-Way ANOVA (Non-parametric) Kruskal-Wallis (Years of Service)					Description	Decision on Ho
Level of Acceptance	χ^2	df	p	ϵ^2	No Significant	Accept
	4.07	5	0.539	0.14	No Significant	Accept

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test show no statistically significant differences in the acceptance levels of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, based on years of service, with a p-value of 0.539. This suggests that the length of service does not significantly influence teachers' acceptance of the order. The effect size further indicates a minimal impact, reinforcing that acceptance levels remain consistent across all experience groups. Moreover, according to Linda J. Graham et. al (2020), beginning teachers are performing as well as, or even better than, their more experienced counterparts. There is still room for improvement in overall teaching quality. To enhance teaching effectiveness across all experience levels, additional support and targeted professional development are needed—not just for new teachers. Instead of traditional, standardized "in-service" or conference-style training, a more tailored approach would be beneficial.

Impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023 on Teaching Practices

Teachers from selected public elementary schools shared their perceptions on the impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on their teaching practices. The following themes were identified based on their responses:

1. No Significant Change in Teaching Methods (Participants 2, 4, 5)
2. Improved Classroom Organization and Efficiency (Participants 2, 3, 6)
3. Increased Focus on Material Preparation (Participants 1, 3, 5)

1. No Significant Change in Teaching Methods (Participants 2, 4, 5)

The theme "No Significant Change in Teaching Methods" emerged from the responses of several teachers who shared their experiences regarding the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023. Despite the directive to remove classroom decorations, these teachers indicated that the core approaches they used in teaching remained largely unaffected by the policy change.

For these educators, the main impact of the order was on the physical classroom environment, particularly the removal of visual elements like posters, charts, and decorative items from the walls. However, the essence of how they conducted their lessons, engaged pupils, or assessed learning did not change. As one teacher noted, "There are no changes in how we teach, just that we no longer spend time printing and attaching decorations" (Participant 2). This statement reflects the sentiment that, although classroom aesthetics were altered, the instructional strategies used to teach pupils remained consistent. Teachers continued to use the same teaching methodologies, lesson plans, and assessment tools as before the order was enacted. For instance, Sugano & Mamolo (2021) discovered that some teaching strategies had minimal impact on pupils' motivation and attitude in teaching. In terms of altering pupil

engagement levels, a meta-analysis showed that although new strategies were implemented, the overall effect size was small, suggesting that there was no difference over traditional techniques.

Another teacher, Participant 4, echoed this idea by stating simply, "None," implying that the removal of decorations did not affect their instructional approach in any way. This response suggests that the teachers in question did not feel the need to modify their teaching practices or adjust their engagement techniques due to the absence of classroom adornments.

Similarly, Participant 5 shared that their teaching methods were not impacted by the policy change, indicating that, while the physical environment may have changed, the teaching practices remained stable. In this sense, the removal of classroom decorations was seen more as a logistical adjustment than a pedagogical shift. The teacher's focus remained on delivering lessons, managing classroom behavior, and supporting pupils' academic needs, regardless of the decor on the walls.

This theme suggests that for these participants, the removal of decorations did not necessitate any substantial changes to their teaching methods. The focus remained on the delivery of content and pupil learning, and teachers adapted by organizing their classrooms in ways that still allowed them to maintain their usual teaching style. The changes brought about by the order were largely external and administrative, with little to no disruption to the foundational teaching practices employed by these educators.

2. Improved Classroom Organization and Efficiency (Participants 2, 3, 6)

The theme "Improved Classroom Organization and Efficiency" reflects how the removal of classroom decorations, as required by DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, resulted in a more organized and efficient classroom environment for certain teachers. According to the responses of Participants 2, 3, and 6, the policy led to practical changes that enhanced the way they managed their teaching materials and classroom space.

Participant 2 shared that the absence of decorations allowed for a more streamlined approach to organizing instructional resources. Without the need to print and hang up posters, charts, or other visual aids, teachers were able to focus on more efficient storage and use of teaching materials. They stated, "Other resources are stored and taken out when needed. They are kept organized." This suggests that, with fewer distractions in the classroom, the materials they did use were stored more systematically and could be accessed more easily when needed for lessons. The overall reduction in clutter made the classroom environment more functional, allowing teachers to spend more time focusing on teaching rather than rearranging or managing decorations.

Participant 3 also acknowledged the efficiency gains resulting from the removal of classroom adornments. The teacher emphasized that the time spent on preparing materials was more productive. With fewer decorations to manage, teachers had more time and mental space to focus on creating and organizing teaching resources tailored to pupil needs. They stated, "It helps me to be more efficient in creating and productive resources." This indicates that the absence of distractions from wall decorations enabled teachers to allocate more time to preparing educational content, which in turn improved their teaching process. Clear organizational methods, easily accessible resources, and activity-defined zones in the classroom reduced teacher stress and boosted pupil engagement. While minimalist classrooms are placed in contrast from that of distraction free classrooms, minimalist classrooms are shown to increase teacher productivity, as they are able for the classrooms to prepare resources rather than focus on decorations Brown (2020).

Similarly, Participant 6 highlighted that the reorganization of classroom space contributed to improved efficiency. Teachers reported that, without the visual clutter, the space became more manageable and allowed for easier retrieval of materials. Participant 6 mentioned how the resources that were still used in the classroom were organized differently, noting, "I just put them together on a hanger to pull out what topic or just for that in one place, it's not like the one on display." This change in how materials were stored and displayed demonstrates how the removal of unnecessary decorations led to a more efficient and organized system for managing instructional resources. Teachers were able to keep the learning materials neatly grouped and easily accessible, which reduced time spent searching for or rearranging resources.

The policy change that led to the removal of decorations in classrooms had an unexpectedly positive effect on the organization and efficiency of classroom management. Teachers reported that the absence of clutter allowed them to keep teaching materials more organized, leading to better use of time and resources. As a result, teachers were able to focus more on delivering lessons and less on the logistical challenges of managing classroom decorations. This theme illustrates how the change in classroom aesthetics created a more functional, streamlined environment conducive to effective teaching and learning.

3. Increased Focus on Material Preparation (Participants 1, 3, 5)

The theme "Increased Focus on Material Preparation" emerged from the responses of Participants 1, 3, and 5, who shared how the removal of classroom decorations, as required by DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, led them to devote more time and attention to preparing instructional materials. For these teachers, the absence of visual distractions allowed them to prioritize the creation and organization of teaching resources that were more directly aligned with their pupils' learning needs.

Participant 1 expressed that the removal of decorations did not significantly change their teaching practices, but it did allow for more focus on other aspects of classroom preparation. They noted, "I made my instructional materials or local materials based on the needs of the learners to achieve during discussions." This response highlights how the removal of distractions from the classroom environment enabled the teacher to put more effort into designing materials that were tailored to pupils' specific learning needs, making the instructional content more relevant and impactful.

Participant 3 similarly reported that the removal of decorations allowed them to shift their focus towards creating and preparing materials that would better support their lessons. "It helps me to be more efficient in creating and productive resources," they stated. Eliminating the task of managing classroom decorations, the teacher was able to allocate more time and energy into developing high-quality, effective teaching resources. This shift in focus may have enhanced the overall quality of the instructional materials, making them more aligned with the pupils' learning objectives and more practical for teaching. Pupils were more engaged and self-directed when teachers planned and prepared materials for pupil-led activities in advance. Pupils were able to work independently thanks to pre-made materials, which freed up more time for teachers to support and attend to the needs of each individual pupil (Howard, T., & Kim, S. 2024).

Participant 5 also observed that the absence of decorations created an opportunity for increased focus on material preparation. They mentioned that, as a result, they had more time to dedicate to preparing materials that better suited the lesson content. While Participant 5 didn't elaborate in detail, the implication is clear: with fewer

distractions and less time spent on classroom aesthetics, teachers could focus more on creating instructional resources that were more intentional and purpose-driven.

This theme suggests that the removal of classroom decorations led to a shift in priorities for these teachers. The change in the classroom environment allowed them to invest more time and effort into preparing instructional materials that were carefully tailored to meet the needs of their pupils. Focusing on material preparation, these educators were able to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of their lessons, ultimately improving their teaching quality and the learning experience for their pupils. This focus on preparation can be seen as an adaptation to the policy that, despite the removal of decorations, allowed teachers to better serve their pupils' educational needs.

Impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023 on Pupils' Learning

Teachers from selected elementary schools shared their insights on the impact of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on pupils' learning experiences. The following themes were identified based on their responses:

1. Improved Pupil's Focus (Participants 2 and 5)
2. Improved Pupil's Engagement (Participant 1 and 6)
3. Visual Learning Opportunities (Participant 6)
4. Retention Challenges Despite Improved Focus (Participant 5)
5. Concerns About pupil Retention (Participant 5, Participant 6)

1. Improved Pupil's Focus (Participants 2, 5, 6)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, appears to have positively influenced pupils' ability to focus in classroom activities, according to several teachers. Participants 2, 5, and 6 all noted that the changes made to the classroom environment—such as the removal of unnecessary decorations, clutter, and distractions—resulted in a noticeable improvement in pupil behavior and participation. Participant 2 highlighted that pupils seemed more focused, particularly in the front areas of the room, implying that the lack of distractions allowed them to concentrate better on the teacher's instructions.

Participant 5 noted that the changes positively impacted pupils' engagement, stating, "The implementation of the DO did affect me in a way that it helped pupils focus more on the lesson." This observation underscores the direct correlation between the classroom environment and pupils' ability to maintain their attention on educational content. With fewer distractions and a more organized space, pupils can immerse themselves more fully in their learning activities. In addition, Participant 5 also echoed this sentiment, observing that the changes in the classroom environment led to pupils concentrating more on the lessons, which helped to improve their overall learning experience. With fewer visual distractions and a cleaner space, pupils appeared to be more in tune with the content being taught, rather than being diverted by excessive wall decorations or materials.

In essence, the changes to the classroom environment, which emphasized simplicity, organization, and minimal distractions, helped foster an atmosphere in which pupils could concentrate better, engage more actively, and participate more freely. Teachers observed that the reduced clutter not only made the physical space more conducive to learning but also promoted a mental shift, allowing pupils to direct more of their attention to their lessons. This resulted in a more focused and engaged classroom, where pupils could better absorb the material being taught.

According to Terada(2024) reduced visual clutter improves concentration and lessens the cognitive load required to interpret irrelevant information.

2. Improved Pupil's Engagement (Participant 1 and 6)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 has significantly enhanced pupils' ability to concentrate on their lessons, as highlighted by participants in the study.

Teachers observed that pupils became more involved in class discussions, activities, and lessons. Participant 1 shared that pupils were "more participative" and expressed enjoyment in the classroom ambience, suggesting that a calmer, more organized environment made them feel more comfortable and ready to engage.

Participant 6 expanded on this idea by describing the classroom atmosphere, saying, "The classroom looks more relaxed; the children can move more because there is no inserted equipment scattered around." This comment reflects how a decluttered space not only minimizes visual distractions but also fosters a more relaxed environment that encourages active participation. When pupils feel comfortable and unencumbered by unnecessary items, they are more likely to engage with the material, ask questions, and participate in discussions.

The improved focus on learning resulting from the implementation of the order creates a more conducive atmosphere for academic success. Pupils are better equipped to absorb new information and engage critically with the lessons being taught. Studies have found that pupils are more likely to participate in class activities and pay attention to the lessons when there are less visual distractions and the classroom is set up for ease of mobility. Lynch(2023)

This transformation not only enhances individual learning experiences but also contributes to a more collaborative classroom dynamic, where pupils feel empowered to share ideas and work together effectively.

In summary, the insights from Participants 5 and 6 illustrate how the physical and organizational changes in the classroom, driven by DepEd Order No. 21, have led to significant improvements in pupils' focus on learning. This emphasis on a well-structured environment highlights the vital role that classroom organization plays in facilitating effective education, ultimately supporting pupils' academic achievements and fostering a culture of engagement and inquiry.

3. Visual Learning Opportunities (Participant 6)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 has created increased opportunities for visual learning within the classroom, enriching the educational experience for pupils. Participant 6 emphasized the importance of visuals by stating, "Some children learn just by looking at visuals." This statement underscores the role that visual aids play in facilitating comprehension and retention of information, particularly for visual learners who benefit from seeing rather than just hearing or reading.

Reorganizing the classroom and removing unnecessary clutter, the order has allowed for a more thoughtful display of educational materials. With a cleaner and more organized environment, teachers can utilize wall space and surfaces for posters, charts, and other visual aids that align with the curriculum. This accessibility to visual resources can enhance understanding of complex concepts and encourage deeper engagement with the lesson content.

Moreover, visual learning opportunities can cater to diverse learning styles among pupils. As Participant 6 noted, the changes have made the classroom look more relaxed, which likely fosters a more open and exploratory atmosphere. In such an environment, pupils feel encouraged to interact with visual materials, whether through independent study or collaborative projects. This engagement not only helps in understanding academic content but also promotes critical thinking as pupils analyze and interpret visual information. According to Mary Odum et.al (2021)

classroom design and visual elements play an essential role in collaborative learning that improve understanding and retention.

Additionally, visuals can serve as powerful memory aids. Integrating relevant images and diagrams into lessons, teachers help reinforce key ideas and concepts, making it easier for pupils to recall information during assessments or discussions. Participant 6's insights highlight the transformative impact that a visually rich classroom can have on pupil learning outcomes.

In summary, the enhanced visual learning opportunities resulting from the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 significantly contribute to a more effective educational environment. Participant 6's comments illustrate how thoughtfully organized visuals can cater to various learning styles, improve comprehension, and foster a more engaging atmosphere for pupils. This emphasis on visual aids not only enriches the learning experience but also supports pupils' academic success by making learning more interactive and accessible.

4. Retention Challenges Despite Improved Focus (Participant 5)

While the classroom changes brought about by DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, seemed to improve pupil focus and engagement, some challenges in pupil retention were still noted by teachers, particularly in the case of younger learners. Participant 5 expressed concerns that despite the enhanced focus in class, pupils were having difficulty retaining fundamental learning materials, such as the alphabet, sight words, and common figures.

This issue likely stems from the removal of various visual aids and classroom decorations that previously supported pupils' learning. Many pupils, especially those in early grades, rely heavily on visual cues for memory retention. For example, the display of alphabet charts, sight word posters, and visual representations of common figures can significantly aid in reinforcing learning by providing consistent visual reminders. According to Brett Henebery(2022) employing visual aids can enhance learning by as much as 400%. This indicates that visual cues, such as diagrams, infographics, and photographs, are more beneficial for pupils' learning than text alone. With these materials removed as part of the changes mandated by the DepEd order, pupils who depend on these visual aids may struggle to remember and internalize key concepts.

Participant 5 noted that the absence of these familiar learning materials seemed to affect pupils' ability to recall foundational elements that are crucial for early literacy and numeracy. This retention challenge highlights a potential downside of the classroom modifications, where the goal of creating a distraction-free space may inadvertently lead to the loss of valuable resources that support memory retention for younger pupils.

Despite the positive impact on pupils' focus, this challenge underscores the need for a balanced approach when implementing such changes. While the aim is to create a more organized and distraction-free environment, it's important to consider how certain tools, like visual aids, can play a crucial role in helping pupils retain and recall important information. Thus, teachers may need to explore alternative methods of reinforcing learning without overwhelming the classroom with unnecessary distractions.

5. Concerns About pupil Retention (Participant 5, Participant 6)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 has raised important concerns among educators regarding pupil retention, particularly among younger learners. Participants expressed their apprehensions about how the absence of visual aids and decorations in the classroom could potentially impact pupils' ability to grasp and retain essential knowledge. A 2022 study by Smith et al. found that well-designed classroom decorations significantly impact

pupils' minds by providing memorable learning experiences. This study revealed that such decorations can boost pupils' concentration and learning levels by 16%, making the learning process more engaging for both pupils and teachers.

Participant 5 shared, "Yes, the retention of letters meets less among KS1 (Kinder-Grade 1)." This statement highlights a direct concern regarding younger pupils' ability to remember fundamental skills such as letter recognition. The participant's observation suggests that, without the colorful visual aids that were previously part of the classroom environment, there may be challenges in helping young learners retain crucial information. This recognition points to a broader issue of how learning environments can influence cognitive development, particularly in foundational stages.

Similarly, Participant 6 remarked, "Some children ask, 'Ma'am, are we going to read?' The alphabets and numbers are still attached." This statement emphasizes the ongoing confusion and distractions pupils face in the absence of familiar classroom decorations. Participant 6 elaborated that some children seemed disengaged and puzzled about the learning process, indicating that the lack of visual stimuli might be impacting their motivation and focus. The participant noted, "Most of them became a distraction... Instead of reading, they don't read," underscoring a concern that the absence of colorful decorations, which could have served as prompts for learning, is leading to decreased engagement and comprehension.

These concerns reflect a significant aspect of the educational landscape—recognizing that visual elements in the classroom can play a crucial role in supporting retention and engagement, especially for younger pupils. The experiences shared by Participant 5 and Participant 6 underscore the importance of balancing the need for a distraction-free learning environment with the necessity of visual aids that can enhance learning and retention.

In conclusion, the discussions surrounding pupil retention among Participants 5 and 6 reveal a critical tension between compliance with the DepEd Order and the practical needs of learners. While the order aims to create a focused learning atmosphere, the concerns raised highlight the need for educators to adapt their strategies to ensure that pupils continue to receive the visual support necessary for effective learning and retention, particularly in early childhood education.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Adapting to DepEd Order No. 21

Participants shared insights into the challenges they faced in adapting to the changes required by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023, highlighting various aspects of their experiences:

1. Logistical Challenges (Participant 1, Participant 2)
2. Adjustment Period (Participant 2, Participant 3)
3. Time Constraints (Participant 5)
4. Emotional Impact on pupils (Participant 6)
5. Individual Variability in Experience (Participant 4)

1. Logistical Challenges (Participant 1, Participant 2)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 has presented significant logistical challenges for educators, as expressed by the participants. One notable concern was articulated by Participant 1, who highlighted the dilemma of where to relocate bulletin boards after their removal. This participant noted the difficulty of finding suitable spaces for these important teaching tools, stating, "the challenge that I faced was, where to put the bulletin boards after removing them."

This situation illustrates not only the practical obstacles faced by teachers but also the uncertainty surrounding future directives. Participant 1 further reflected on the anxiety related to potential future changes, remarking, "the thinking that someday when there is a new DepEd Sec and order to put wall decors again." This sentiment underscores a lack of stability in the classroom environment and an ongoing concern about how future policies may complicate their current efforts. Teachers who are accustomed to using visual aids, posters, or other decorations as teaching tools may struggle to adapt their instructional strategies to a minimalist environment. They may feel that the policy hinders their ability to effectively communicate complex concepts or create interactive learning experiences (Tubo, 2023).

The logistical challenges highlighted by these participants extend beyond the mere relocation of bulletin e-boards. The reorganization of classroom materials and the need to create a functional learning environment under new regulations require significant time and effort. The struggle to maintain an organized, resource-rich classroom amidst these changes illustrates the broader impact of DepEd Order No. 21 on the teaching landscape, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and necessitating additional planning and adjustment from educators.

In summary, the logistical challenges faced by educators in adapting to the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 are multi-faceted, involving not only practical difficulties related to space and organization. These insights from the participants paint a clear picture of the complexities involved in navigating these new requirements in the classroom.

2. Adjustment Period (Participant 2, Participant 3)

The adjustment period following the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, revealed a range of experiences among educators, as highlighted by participants in their responses. Participant 2 noted that, although many teachers initially found the changes "troublesome," there was a noticeable evolution in their attitudes. Reflecting on this transition, the participant remarked, "But once they got used to the idea, it was better. After that, everything was fine." This shift illustrates the inherent challenges of adapting to new policies, where initial discomfort often gives way to more positive acceptance over time.

Similarly, studies indicate that the reopening of classes in 2023 led many teachers to experience an adjustment period. Teachers, especially those who initially felt overwhelmed by new tasks and obligations, eventually adapted as they became familiar with the new routines (Dellomos et al., 2023). This process of acclimatization is essential, as educators typically need time to internalize and adjust to new practices, resulting in smoother implementation as they become more comfortable with the revised expectations.

Participant 3 further emphasized the complexities of this adjustment period, highlighting the necessity of "time and effort" required to adapt to the changes. This acknowledgment underscores that adaptation involves more than merely altering physical classroom elements; it also demands a substantial investment in emotional and cognitive labor. According to a 2021 study, teachers experience considerable emotional and mental strain when adjusting to new teaching directives, which can impact their well-being and efficacy (Kariou et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers often engage in various forms of "emotional labor." As they adapt lesson plans and teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of pupils and educational standards, they frequently manage their emotions to create a supportive classroom environment (Chang et al., 2022). Teachers must dedicate time to rethink their lesson plans, restructure their teaching approaches, and develop new strategies that align with the new directives.

The adjustment period can be seen as a journey where educators must navigate not only the logistical aspects of the changes but also their own emotional responses. The initial resistance and discomfort articulated by Participant 2 suggest a natural human reaction to change, while the acknowledgment of time and effort by Participant 3 emphasizes the dedication required to successfully adapt to new teaching environments.

Overall, these insights paint a nuanced picture of the adjustment period following the implementation of DepEd Order No. 21. While challenges and initial resistance are common, the eventual acceptance and adaptation among educators highlight their resilience and commitment to providing effective learning environments for their pupils. The experiences shared by the participants reflect the dynamic nature of educational change, where time, effort, and a willingness to adapt play crucial roles in overcoming challenges and fostering a positive transition.

3. Time Constraints (Participant 5)

Time constraints emerged as a significant challenge for educators adapting to the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023, as articulated by Participant 5. This participant highlighted the pressure of limited time by stating, "the challenge/s I experience is that there is a time constraint in terms of opening the classes." Teachers faced time constraints during the opening of classes because they had not yet finished removing decorations as the start of the school year approached. According to Harris & Williams (2022), time constraints are a significant factor that impacts teachers' ability to implement educational reforms effectively. This observation underscores the reality that teachers must not only adapt their teaching practices to comply with new regulations but also do so within the confines of a rapidly approaching school year.

The impact of time constraints is multifaceted. With the beginning of classes looming, educators often find themselves juggling numerous responsibilities, from preparing lesson plans to organizing classroom materials. The added complexity of implementing new policies means that teachers must quickly develop new strategies and classroom layouts, all while ensuring that their pupils are ready to learn. This can create a heightened sense of stress, as the need to meet regulatory requirements may conflict with the time available for thoughtful planning and preparation.

Participant 5's acknowledgment of time constraints reveals how such limitations can hinder the effectiveness of the adaptation process. When educators are pressed for time, there is a risk that they may not fully engage with the new directives or explore creative ways to implement them effectively. Instead, they might resort to quick fixes that do not necessarily enhance the learning experience.

Moreover, the urgency created by time constraints can affect educators' overall well-being, leading to feelings of overwhelm and burnout. The pressure to meet deadlines can detract from their ability to reflect on their practices and make informed decisions that align with their teaching philosophy and the needs of their pupils.

In summary, the time constraints identified by Participant 5 highlight a critical barrier to effective adaptation to DepEd Order No. 21. According to Harris & Williams (2022), time constraints are a significant factor that impacts teachers' ability to implement educational reforms effectively. This challenge not only complicates the logistical aspects of implementing new policies but also affects educators' mental and emotional capacities, ultimately impacting the quality of education they are able to provide. Addressing these time constraints will be essential for facilitating a smoother transition and ensuring that educators can fully embrace the changes in a way that supports both their professional growth and their pupils' learning outcomes.

4. Emotional Impact on pupils (Participant 6)

The emotional impact of the changes brought about by DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 extends beyond the challenges faced by educators, significantly affecting pupils as well. Participant 6 articulated this concern by noting that in the lower grades, pupils often look to their surroundings for cues in their learning journey. "Younger learners, especially in lower grades, benefit from familiar visual elements in the classroom as these help them recognize and engage with their surroundings, supporting their reading and learning process." The removal of familiar classroom decor and resources can lead to confusion among pupils, who rely on visual stimuli to engage with their educational environment. The key is to strike a balance between decoration and functionality. The directive should be more lenient for younger learners, such as kindergarten pupils, who'll benefit from constantly seeing basic educational posters such as letters of the alphabet, shapes and colors (Diaz, 2023).

Participant 6 further highlighted the emotional responses of pupils, stating that they often ask why the decorations and familiar visuals are no longer present, indicating a sense of loss and regret. This reaction underscores the significance of a visually rich learning environment for children, particularly in the formative years of their education. The absence of these elements can lead to feelings of disconnection, making it harder for pupils to relate to the learning material and reducing their overall engagement.

The emotional impact of these changes can manifest in several ways. For instance, pupils may confuse or uncertainty as they navigate a new classroom environment that lacks the visual aids they previously relied upon. The absence of familiar decorations can also disrupt their sense of belonging and security within the classroom, leading to a less conducive atmosphere for learning.

Moreover, Participant 6's insights suggest that educators need to be aware of and address these emotional reactions to support their pupils effectively. Understanding the feelings of confusion among pupils is crucial for teachers as they navigate the implementation of new policies. Educators may need to develop alternative strategies that can provide visual support and foster a sense of familiarity, even in a less decorated classroom setting.

In conclusion, the emotional impact on pupils resulting from the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21 is a critical consideration for educators. The insights from Participant 6 illustrate the importance of recognizing and addressing pupils' feelings in order to create a supportive and engaging learning environment. Being mindful of the emotional challenges faced by their pupils, educators can work to mitigate negative reactions and enhance the overall educational experience during this transition.

5. Individual Variability in Experience (Participant 4)

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023 has led to diverse experiences among educators, emphasizing the theme of individual variability in responses to the changes. Participant 4 notably stated, "None," indicating that they did not face any significant challenges or difficulties in adapting to the new requirements. This response contrasts sharply with the experiences shared by other participants, underscoring that the impact of educational policies can vary widely among individuals based on several factors.

Participant 4's lack of perceived challenges highlights the importance of personal context in shaping one's experience of change. Factors such as prior experience with similar adaptations, individual resilience, or different teaching philosophies can play crucial roles in how educators respond to new mandates. While some educators may

find the changes overwhelming or disruptive, others may view them as manageable or even beneficial. This divergence in experiences can lead to varied levels of engagement and adaptation strategies among teachers.

This theme of individual variability emphasizes that educational reforms do not affect all educators uniformly. For example, while some teachers might struggle with logistical challenges, time constraints, and emotional impacts on pupils, others may adapt seamlessly due to a variety of personal and contextual factors. This variability can be influenced by aspects such as teaching experience, familiarity with classroom management, and individual coping mechanisms. According to Lee & Tan (2024), individual variability influences how educators respond to educational reforms. The study underscores that factors like teaching experience, classroom management, and personal coping mechanisms play a critical role in whether teachers experience challenges or adapt seamlessly to new changes. The study's findings directly align with your assertion that the impact of educational reforms varies based on these personal and contextual factors.

Recognizing this individual variability is essential for educational leaders and policymakers. It suggests the need for tailored support systems that acknowledge and address the diverse needs of educators during transitions. For instance, professional development programs could benefit from being flexible, offering resources and strategies that cater to both those struggling with the changes and those who may require minimal assistance

In summary, Participant 4's response underscores the theme of individual variability in experience regarding the changes mandated by DepEd Order No. 21. This variability highlights the necessity for nuanced approaches to support educators as they navigate adaptations, ensuring that all voices are considered in the implementation process. Acknowledging the diversity of experiences can enhance the effectiveness of educational reforms and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for teachers.

Action Plan for Improving the Implementation of DepEd Order No. 21 Series of 2023

Based on the insights gathered from participants regarding the implementation of the DepEd Order No. 21, a comprehensive plan can be developed to address the key themes identified: Financial Support, Consistency and Stability, Resource Provision, Clear Guidelines, Professional Development, Review and Evaluation, and Communication and Dissemination.

Areas of Concerns	Actions	Activities	Timeline	Persons Involved	Success Indicators	Evaluation
Financial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocate for increased budget allocations for the storage of removed classroom decorations. - Develop a proposal for funding materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct a budget review meeting with stakeholders. - Prepare and submit a funding proposal. 	Short-Term (0-6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School Prindpal - Financial Officer - Teachers' Assodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20% increase in budget allocation for educational resources. - Approval of funding proposal. 	Measure budget allocation and resources secured.
Pupils Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create any engaging visuals to increase retention of pupils (PowerPoint Presentation, Figures, and any Digital materials) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement engaging activities incorporating the 5 macro skills (reciting the alphabet, singing the phonemes of letters, and etc.) 	Short term (0-6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers - Pupils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% of the pupils will increase their retention if these activities and actions are incorporated in their daily routine. - Teachers focused on teaching materials preparation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluate pupils retention through formative assessment -Rubrics will be utilized to assess the retention of pupils through performance tasks.
Resource Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct a needs assessment for materials. - Allocate funds for essential educational resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribute a survey to teachers on resource needs. - Organize a resource fair for teachers to access materials. 	Medium-Term (6-12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource Committee - Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% of teachers report access to necessary materials. - Satisfaction rating of 4/5 or higher in resource fair feedback. 	Evaluate resource availability and teacher satisfaction.
Clear Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a detailed manual outlining implementation requirements. - Provide a seminar/orientation for clear discussion for pupils and parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Draft and distribute a comprehensive manual. 	Short-Term (0-6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curriculum Coordinator - Seminar Facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 90% of teachers indicate understanding of guidelines in post-workshop surveys. - Manual distribution to all teachers. 	Monitor clarity of guidelines and teacher comprehension.

CONCLUSION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The findings suggested that the demographic distribution of participants played a role in shaping the results. The equal gender representation supported a balanced analysis, minimizing gender-based biases in the data. Age-wise, the predominance of participants in their thirties and forties may have influenced the outcomes, as this group likely brought mature, stable, and experienced perspectives to the study. Similarly, the concentration of participants with 6-10 years of service implied that the insights provided primarily represented individuals with a moderate level of experience, who may have had an established yet evolving understanding of their roles. Overall, these demographics indicated that the results were largely shaped by individuals who brought a mix of mature and moderately experienced viewpoints to the study, providing a well-rounded basis for analysis.

Level of Acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among Selected Public Elementary Teachers

The findings revealed a positive overall acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, among public elementary teachers, as they largely agreed with the rationale behind the policy and its objectives to foster a cleaner and more conducive learning environment. This acceptance was strengthened by teachers' understanding of the order's goals, as well as their awareness of the requirements needed for compliance. However, teachers' challenges in adapting their teaching practices and the perceived lack of ongoing administrative support indicated areas where further improvement was necessary. These issues suggested that while the teachers were open to the mandated changes, successful implementation would require addressing the logistical and support-related obstacles they faced.

Perceived Impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on Teaching Practices among Selected Public Elementary Teachers

The implementation of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, led to varied responses among teachers, with many reporting minimal disruption to their core teaching practices. The removal of classroom decorations, while perceived by some as a logistical change, had an unexpectedly positive effect on classroom organization and efficiency. Teachers who adapted to this change by focusing more on material preparation found that it allowed them to develop more effective, pupil-centered instructional resources. Thus, the policy's impact was more pronounced in the areas of classroom management and resource preparation rather than in altering teaching methodologies.

Perceived Impacts of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, on Pupil Learning

The findings suggested that DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, had a generally positive impact on pupil focus and engagement by reducing classroom clutter and distractions. However, the removal of visual aids crucial for retention, particularly for younger learners, presented a challenge that needed addressing. Teachers observed a significant improvement in participation and concentration, but the loss of familiar visual materials underscored the importance of retaining certain learning tools to support memory and recall, especially for foundational subjects.

Differences in Acceptance Based on Demographic Factors

The analyses revealed no significant differences in the level of acceptance of DepEd Order No. 21, Series of 2023, across demographic variables such as gender, age, and length of service. This suggested a uniform level of acceptance across these categories, reflecting a general consistency in perception among the surveyed teachers.

Changes in Teaching Practices Due to DepEd Order No. 21

The findings revealed that DepEd Order No. 21 significantly influenced teaching practices, leading to both positive and challenging aspects. The increase in pupils' focus suggested that the order successfully created a more

conducive learning environment. However, the additional time required for developing teaching materials placed extra demands on educators, underscoring the importance of providing adequate support and resources. The emphasis on consistency in teaching approaches pointed to a collective effort among educators to standardize practices, which could enhance overall pupils' learning experiences. Conversely, concerns about pupils' retention and the mixed feedback highlighted the need for ongoing evaluation of the implementation process. Educators also evolved in their understanding of classroom management, which may require further professional development to navigate these changes effectively.

Challenges Faced in Adapting to DepEd Order No. 21

The findings underscored that while DepEd Order No. 21 had the potential to enhance the educational environment, its implementation was not without challenges. Logistical difficulties suggested that the infrastructure and resources necessary to support the new order needed further attention. The requirement for an adjustment period emphasized the importance of providing adequate time and support for both educators and pupils to adapt. Time constraints reflected the ongoing demands placed on teachers, which could hinder their ability to implement the changes effectively. Moreover, the emotional impact on pupils warranted consideration, as their well-being was crucial for successful learning outcomes. The individual variability in experiences among educators indicated that tailored support and resources might be necessary to facilitate a smoother transition for all teachers.

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