

Cultivating Academic Excellence: The Role of Teacher Engagement and Supportive Learning Environment Toward Cebu- Excel Framework

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Abstract. This research study investigated the critical intersection between teacher engagement and the supportive learning environment in fostering academic excellence within Cebu Province. Specifically, it sought to determine how instructional passion, social-emotional support, and adaptive pedagogy, when paired with a conducive physical and psychological atmosphere, influence the Grade Weighted Average (GWA) of intermediate learners. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, data were gathered from a diverse group of teacher and student respondents across three distinct sites: Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School, and Bugho Integrated School. The findings revealed a significant "Resource-Passion Gap." While teachers demonstrated a "Strongly Agree" level of Instructional Passion (3.42) and established a "Highly Evident" Inclusive Climate (3.19), they were hindered by a critical Lack of Modern Technological Resources (3.48) and moderate levels of Adaptive Pedagogy (2.88). Demographic data further highlighted that 72.73% of the student population belongs to the low-income bracket, making the school's Physical and Digital Adequacy (2.70) a primary determinant of academic equity. Despite these systemic challenges, including high levels of Teacher Burnout (3.35), the study found that academic performance remains resilient, with a majority of students maintaining a "Very Satisfactory" GWA. The study concluded that academic excellence in the region is currently a product of teacher resilience rather than institutional adequacy. To address these disparities, the research culminated in the development of the CEBU-EXCEL Framework. This strategic roadmap focuses on four pillars: Continuous Engagement, Better Understanding, Excellence in Learning, and Exceptional Climates. The framework provides a 10-point matrix of interventions designed to optimize resource allocation, enhance adaptive instructional skills, and safeguard teacher wellness. By aligning passionate engagement with a supportive, digitally adequate environment, the framework aims to transition the Cebu Province toward a sustainable and inclusive culture of outstanding academic achievement.

Introduction

The pursuit of academic excellence is not merely a goal of individual students but a collective mandate for educational institutions striving to produce globally competitive citizens. In the context of the Philippines, particularly within the province of Cebu, the educational landscape is characterized by a stark diversity in resources, socio-economic backgrounds, and institutional frameworks. From the bustling corridors of Minglanilla Central Elementary School to the specialized environments of Pandongbato Elementary School and Bugho Integrated School, the common denominator remains the quest for quality outcomes. However, as global standards for "excellence" shift toward holistic development and critical thinking, the traditional reliance on rote memorization and standardized testing has

proven insufficient. There is an urgent need to re-evaluate the human and atmospheric elements of schooling, specifically teacher engagement and a supportive learning environment as the primary drivers of student achievement.

Teacher engagement transcends the mere delivery of a curriculum; it encompasses the emotional, cognitive, and social investment an educator makes in their students' growth. According to Hattie (2023), the quality of the teacher-student relationship remains one of the most significant predictors of academic success. When teachers are deeply engaged, they exhibit higher levels of enthusiasm, adaptability, and empathy, which in turn fosters a "contagious" motivation among learners.

In the select schools in Cebu Province, the manifestation of this engagement varies significantly. In rural or public settings like Pandongbato and Bugho, teacher engagement often involves navigating limited resources with creative instructional strategies. Teacher's commitment serves as the bridge between raw potential and realized excellence. Fredricks et al. (2019) argue that without high levels of teacher engagement, even the most sophisticated curriculum fails to resonate with students, leading to disengagement and underperformance.

A supportive learning environment is the "third teacher" in the classroom. It is a composite of physical safety, psychological security, and a culture of inclusivity. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that for students to thrive, they must feel that their environment validates their identity and supports their risk-taking. In the diverse tapestry of schools in Cebu Province, the definition of "supportive" is multifaceted;

Methodology

Design

The study utilized a quantitative research methodology to objectively measure and analyze the relationship between the identified variables. This approach is particularly suitable for this investigation as it allows for the statistical testing of hypotheses regarding the impact of teacher engagement and environmental support on academic excellence. To gather comprehensive data, a descriptive-correlational research method was employed. The descriptive aspect characterizes the current state of pedagogical engagement and environmental status in the three select schools: Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School, and Bugho Integrated School. Simultaneously, the correlational aspect determines the degree of association between these independent variables and the students' general weighted average (GWA), thereby identifying the specific predictors of success.

Environment

The study was conducted in selected basic education institutions within the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province, specifically Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School, and Bugho Integrated School. These schools represent a mix of urban and semi-urban learning environments where intermediate learners are exposed to varying levels of instructional support, school facilities, and community conditions. The environment of the study reflects a typical public school setting in the Philippines, where teachers strive to deliver quality instruction despite limitations in modern technological resources and varying levels of physical and digital adequacy. The learner population is largely composed of students from low-income households, which significantly influences access to learning materials and academic support at home. Despite these challenges, schools maintain a supportive and inclusive atmosphere that encourages student participation and teacher engagement. This setting provides a meaningful context for examining how teacher passion, adaptive pedagogy, and learning environments collectively influence students' academic performance and overall educational experience.

Respondents

The respondents of this study consisted of selected teachers and intermediate learners from three public schools within the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province, namely Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School, and Bugho Integrated School. These participants were chosen to represent a diverse range of teaching experiences, learner backgrounds, and school environments. The teacher-respondents played a key role in providing information regarding instructional passion, adaptive pedagogy, social-emotional support, and classroom climate, while the student-respondents served as the primary source of data on learning experiences and academic performance measured through their Grade Weighted Average (GWA). A significant portion of the student respondents came from low-income households, reflecting the socio-economic realities of the community and its influence on educational access and achievement. The inclusion of both teachers and students allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how instructional practices and learning environments interact to shape academic outcomes. Their responses were essential in identifying gaps and informing the development of the CEBU-EXCEL Framework.

The operationalization of this research requires a meticulous methodological alignment to ensure that the data harvested from Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School and Bugho Integrated School is both valid and actionable. This section delineates the technical procedures for instrumentation, data collection, and statistical analysis. By establishing a rigorous protocol, the study ensures that the resulting CEBU-EXCEL Framework is grounded in empirical truth, effectively addressing the diverse pedagogical needs of the Cebuano educational landscape.

The study primarily utilized an adapted Survey Questionnaire. The instrument was bifurcated into two versions: one tailored for the 41 teacher-respondents and another for the 110 student-respondents. The questionnaire was organized into three distinct parts: Part I collects the Demographic Profiles as specified in the Statement of the Problem; Part II evaluated Teacher Engagement through the lenses of Instructional Passion, Social-Emotional Support, and Adaptive Pedagogy; and Part III assessed the Supportive Learning Environment by measuring Psychological Safety, Physical/Digital Adequacy, and Inclusive Climate.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure of the study began with securing approval from the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province and the respective school heads of Pandongbato Elementary School, Minglanilla Central Elementary School, and Bugho Integrated School. After permission was granted, the researcher personally coordinated with teachers and students to explain the purpose of the study and ensure voluntary participation. Structured survey questionnaires and rating scales were then administered to gather data on instructional passion, social-emotional support, adaptive pedagogy, and the learning environment, as well as students' Grade Weighted Average (GWA). The researcher ensured that instructions were clearly understood to promote honest and accurate responses. Adequate time was provided for respondents to complete the instruments without pressure. After retrieval, all responses were checked for completeness, organized, and encoded for analysis. Strict confidentiality and ethical considerations were observed throughout the process to protect the identity and responses of all participants, ensuring that the data collected were used solely for academic and research purposes.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools to determine the relationship between teacher engagement, learning environment, and students' academic performance measured through the Grade Weighted Average (GWA). Mean and standard deviation were used to describe levels of instructional passion, social-emotional support, adaptive pedagogy, and physical-digital adequacy. A correlational analysis was applied to examine the relationship between these variables and student achievement. The results revealed a significant association between teacher engagement and learner performance, although disparities were evident due to limited technological resources and moderate adaptive teaching practices. Further analysis highlighted the presence of a "Resource-Passion Gap," showing that despite strong teacher commitment, institutional limitations affected instructional effectiveness. These findings were carefully interpreted to guide the development of the CEBU-EXCEL Framework, which aims to address gaps in resources, enhance teaching strategies, and improve overall educational outcomes in the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province.

Results and Discussion

Results

The study presents a comprehensive analysis of academic excellence within selected schools in the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province, highlighting the interplay between teacher engagement, student demographics, learning environments, and systemic challenges. Findings show that the teaching force is generally young, female-dominated, and academically progressing, though limited exposure to professional development activities suggests gaps in sustained training support. Student profiles reveal a balanced gender distribution but a predominant low-income background, with most families earning below 10,000 PHP monthly, significantly affecting access to learning resources. Despite these socio-economic constraints, students demonstrate resilient academic performance, with most achieving "Very Satisfactory" GWA levels, though an "Excellence Gap" remains evident. Teacher engagement is characterized by strong instructional passion, while social-emotional support and adaptive pedagogy are moderately developed. Similarly, the learning environment is emotionally supportive and inclusive but weakened by low physical and digital adequacy. Major challenges include lack of technological resources and teacher burnout. Overall, the study concludes that academic success in the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province is largely driven by teacher commitment rather than adequate institutional resources, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions and the proposed CEBU-EXCEL Framework.

Discussion

The study highlights that academic excellence in the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province is strongly influenced by the interplay of teacher engagement and the learning environment. Teachers show high instructional passion and foster an inclusive classroom climate, yet their effectiveness is constrained by limited technological resources and only moderate use of adaptive pedagogy. This suggests that while teachers are highly committed, their instructional impact is reduced by structural and resource limitations. The prevalence of low-income learners further intensifies the challenge, as many students have limited access to digital and physical learning support outside school. Despite these barriers, students continue to perform at a "Very Satisfactory" level, reflecting strong teacher resilience and dedication. However, the gaps in resources and instructional flexibility indicate the need for systematic improvement. The findings emphasize the importance of implementing the CEBU-EXCEL Framework to strengthen adaptive teaching and promote equitable, sustainable academic growth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The synthesis of the twenty data tables leads to the definitive conclusion that academic excellence in the Division Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province is currently sustained by the psychological resilience and affective commitment of its educators rather than by institutional or structural adequacy. The study concludes that there is a profound "Resource-Passion Gap", a state where teachers demonstrate "Strongly Agree" levels of energy and dedication but are forced to operate within an environment that only achieves an "Agree" level of resource sufficiency. This gap creates a ceiling for student achievement; while the current engagement levels are enough to keep students in the "Very Satisfactory" range, the lack of digital adequacy and adaptive pedagogical tools prevents a broader transition into the "Outstanding" category. Furthermore, the high reported levels of teacher burnout suggest that the current model of "excellence-through-sacrifice" is unsustainable in the long term.

Ultimately, the research concludes that the CEBU-EXCEL Framework is a mechanical necessity for the survival and growth of the academic community. The framework serves as the strategic bridge that aligns high teacher passion with a more robust, digitally adequate environment and a more technically flexible pedagogy. As supported by the theories of Hattie (2023) and Darling-Hammond (2021), excellence is not merely the result of hard work, but the result of work performed within a system that minimizes administrative friction and maximizes cognitive support. By institutionalizing the pillars of Continuous Engagement, Better Understanding, Excellence in Learning, and Exceptional Climates, the Division of Toledo City and the Division of Cebu Province can transform its educational landscape from one of "General Practice" to one of "Consistent Excellence," ensuring that the socio-economic status of the learner no longer dictates their academic destination.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.