

Empowering Struggling Learners Through Project SERVES (Supportive and Engaging Resources Validated to Empower Struggling Students): A Developer-Centered Analysis of Implementation Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study aimed at examining the challenges faced among senior high school teachers in developing instructional materials for the Project SERVES (Supportive and Engaging Resources Validated to Empower Struggling Students) during School Year 2024-2025. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of the respondents on the challenges they encountered in the development phase of learning modules/activity sheets. The study utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to explore the challenges the participants encountered in the implementation of the Project SERVES. The sample of six (6) participants was selected based on their experience relative to the project. Using thematic analysis, patterns relevant to the research questions were coded,

categorized and identified themes. The results from the data analysis among teacher-participants focused on six themes: Cognitive and Emotional Demands of Instructional Design, Reflective Practice and Professional Growth, Learner-Centered Design for Diverse Contexts, Competency-Based Instruction and Differentiation, and Professional Learning, Motivation, and Time Management. Teachers navigate complex challenges in creating inclusive, learner-centered materials aligned with diverse student needs and curriculum competencies, all while facing practical constraints such as inadequate training, limited resources, and competing responsibilities.

Keywords: *Project SERVES, instructional design, reflective practice, differentiation*

INTRODUCTION

The dynamic educational landscape necessitates the development and redevelopment of instructional materials that will cater the needs of learners suitable to their learning requirements and backgrounds. While there are readily available instructional materials in the online platform, many of these resources do not resonate localized and contextualized features, making the content unrelatable especially to those who are struggling academically.

The creation of the Project SERVES (Supportive and Engaging Resources Validated to Empower Struggling Students) stemmed in the belief that all learners—regardless of their academic standing—deserve equitable access to high-quality, learner-centered resources that they can utilize at their own pace and convenience. The project enables teachers to design instructional materials that are appropriate to the needs of struggling students whether they are enrolled in the regular program or other academic programs.

The development of instructional materials has always been a fundamental aspect of effective teaching, especially in addressing the diverse needs of learners. Recently, there has been a shift towards developing localized and contextualized resources not only conform to curriculum standards but also connect with learners' cultural, social, and community backgrounds. This strategy becomes more critical when supporting struggling students, who often need more tailored and relatable content to enhance their engagement and understanding.

As defined, localized instructional materials are those adapted to reflect the specific language, culture, and experiences of a particular community. On the other hand, contextualized materials are those materials designed to related lessons to real-life situations familiar to learners (DepEd, 2016). According to Gay (2010), students' motivation, participation, and comprehension improve significantly when they are able to see their realities and experiences reflected in instructional content. The foundation of Project SERVES is evidently aligned with the aforementioned principles, enabling the development of supportive and accessible resources to empower learners at risk of academic failure.

However, despite the acknowledged benefits, teacher-developers often encounter a number of challenges in crafting instructional materials. Issues on time constraints, lack of access to localized content, inadequate training in material development, and a lack of institutional support are some of the challenges cited in existing studies. Furthermore, the pressure to fulfill curriculum demands while tailoring content for diverse learners can result in teacher burnout and poor quality of material production (Flores, 2018). These challenges are evident in areas with underdeveloped educational infrastructure or where teachers serve multiple roles beyond teaching.

It can be gleaned in several studies the implications of teacher involvement in instructional design. Active inclusion of teachers in the development of educational resources lead to production of more aligned resources salient to the actual classroom needs (Tomlinson, 2014). However, there are certain process, such as structured capacity-building programs, that should be integrated to ensure its effectiveness. Professional development activities, such as DepEd's Learning Action Cell (LAC), help teachers in developing contextualized and localized lessons effectively (DepEd, 2016).

With this, Project SERVES acts as a response to learners' academic needs and emerges as a platform in addressing teacher-developers' experiences in materials development. The project aims to close the gaps by honing teachers with appropriate tools, time, and validation to develop instructional materials for struggling learners that are engaging and culturally relevant.

However, it is also crucial to examine the challenges encountered by teacher-developers in the development of these resources. As key implementers of the project, teacher play a vital role in ensuring the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of the program. Thus, underscores the need to conduct the present study.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants in developing instructional materials for Project SERVES?
2. What challenges do the instructional material developers encounter during the design and implementation of Project SERVES?
3. What suggestions and recommendations do the participants offer to enhance the implementation of the project?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach situated within an action research framework. The phenomenological design was selected to explore and describe the lived experiences of senior high school teachers as instructional material developers for Project SERVES. This approach is particularly appropriate as it seeks to uncover the essence of human experience regarding a particular phenomenon—specifically, the teachers' experiences in developing learning modules and activity sheets for Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM).

Research Locale

The study was conducted at Antonio C. Esguerra Memorial National High School, a duly recognized public secondary school in Taytay, Rizal. The study involved six senior high school teachers who served as participants responsible for the development of learning modules and activity sheets for Project SERVES.

Sampling Technique

Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique wherein participants are chosen based on their specific experiences, knowledge, and direct involvement with the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The primary data collection used in the study was a semi-structured interview guide consisting of a series of formulated open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they offer the flexibility to probe emergent themes while maintaining a consistent focus on the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interview guide was developed to elicit rich, narrative data regarding participants' experiences, challenges, insights, and reflective practices as instructional material developers.

Data collection was facilitated through interviews, which served as the medium for gathering the teachers' experiences. This approach was practical for documenting responses systematically while accommodating the participants' schedules and constraints.

The research procedure unfolded through systematic stages beginning with participant recruitment and orientation, wherein the six senior high school teachers were informed of the study's purpose, scope, and anticipated outcomes to establish transparency and prepare them for their dual roles as material developers and research informants. Participants then engaged in the actual development of learning modules and activity sheets for Project SERVES under the Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) framework, constituting the "action" component of the action research cycle where teachers applied their pedagogical

expertise to create instructional materials designed for modular delivery. Following the development phase, data collection was conducted through interviews where the researcher gathered participants' lived experiences via semi-structured interviews guided by formulated open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, narrative data regarding their experiences, challenges, and reflective practices as instructional material developers.

The interview underwent thematic analysis, a method for coding, categorizing, and reporting pattern within qualitative data. The analysis proceeded through six phases: familiarization with data, wherein the researcher repeatedly read the transcribed interview responses to gain an overarching understanding of participants' experiences; initial coding, where systematic coding was applied across the entire dataset to identify meaningful features relevant to the research questions; theme generation, wherein codes were collated into potential themes gathering all relevant coded extracts under broader thematic categories; theme review, where themes were checked against the coded extracts and the full dataset to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness; theme definition and naming, wherein each theme was clearly defined to capture its essence; and finally, report production, where the analysis was synthesized into a coherent narrative providing inference and conclusion regarding the teachers' lived experiences as instructional material developers.

This analytical approach, stemmed in the framework established by Braun and Clarke (2013), allowed the researchers to move beyond surface-level description and interpret the essence of participants' experiences. By systematically working through the dataset, the researchers ensured that the emerging themes were firmly anchored in the participants' own words and perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings while maintaining fidelity to the phenomenological commitment to understanding lived experience from the participants' viewpoints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of the Participants in Developing Instructional Materials

Theme 1. The Cognitive and Emotional Demands of Instructional Design.

It can be gleaned in the responses of the participants that development of contextualized and localized instructional materials for Project SERVES reflect the importance of mental and emotional labor. The participants describe the process as 'challenging, time-consuming, and requiring patience and preparation'. Such tedious process is aligned with Sweller's Cognitive Load (1988 as cited in Houichi & Sarnou, 2020) which explains how the brain handles complex tasks like instructional design. In an interview with Teacher B, she stated that:

"It is quite challenging to develop a learning module. It takes time and effort to gather resources. It brings satisfaction after a challenging day."

As the theory asserts, teachers must manage the difficulty of the content, inefficient design, and building schemas. The initial phases of module development frequently place high demands on working memory, causing feelings of overwhelm.

Moreover, the evidences from participants revealed how teachers include emotional investment towards their work. Hochschild's Emotional Labor in Teaching (1983 as cited in Tore, 2021) which reflects how teachers regulate emotions to appear composed, patient, and engaged. In a statement with Teacher D, he said that:

“Developing your own module is really not easy. It needs a lot of patience especially when making activities na dapat align sa mga competencies sa lesson. Sobrang dapat kailangan ng mahabang preparation para maging maganda, swak at tiyak na makakasabay ang mga learner mo sa mga paksa at gawain.

The statement above implies emotional investment even amid difficulty.

Theme 2: Reflective Practice and Professional Growth.

The participants highlighted a clear trajectory from difficulty to fulfillment, asserting that module development is a task that requires reflective and experiential learning. As posited in Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (1984 as cited in Morris, 2019), teachers recognize their own growth, learning through practice, evaluation, and modification. In a statement of Teacher A:

“Initially, it was quite challenging, especially in formulating ideas on how to start each topic, determining suitable activities for each, and considering the learners as well. But once you get the ideas sorted out, accomplishing the rest becomes less difficult. I guess it was a fulfilling challenge after all.”

This cited statement outlines the theory’s cycle in the process of developing modules, such as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation

Theme 3: Learner-Centered Pedagogy and Curriculum Alignment.

Teachers consistently emphasize the crucial role of learners’ needs consideration, aligning activities with competencies and ensuring learners obtain the target outcomes. This reflects a deep commitment to learner-centered design. The Universal Design for Learning is salient in this analysis as it highlights characteristics such as relevance and accessibility, demonstrating teacher’s commitment to inclusivity and diverse learners’ needs (Sewell et al., 2022). This notion is reflected in the statement of Teacher E, asserting that:

“In developing learning modules and activity sheets for Project SERVES, my experience has been both fulfilling and enriching. The process involved several key stages: curriculum alignment, content development, learner-centered design, and iterative review.”

Challenges Encountered Among Instructional Material Developers

Theme 1: Inclusivity and Learner-Centered Design for Diverse Contexts.

This section strongly reflects an effort to make instructional materials inclusive, accessible, and adaptable for diverse learners. Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory (1978 as cited in Jeong, 2022) supports the need for contextualized materials wherein learners’ social, cultural, and linguistic realities are considered. This is evident in the narrative of Teacher A, stating that:

“Designing learner-friendly materials for diverse students—considering differences in learning pace, access to resources, and levels of comprehension. I had to be mindful in simplifying instructions, using localized examples, and making sure the activities were inclusive and easy to follow, especially for those in remote or underserved areas.”

The process of module development also considers localized examples and simplified instructions which help scaffold students' zone of proximal development. This includes simplifying language, localizing content, and creating independent or flexible learning tasks.

Theme 2: Competency-Based Instruction and Differentiation.

Some of the challenges revealed from the gathered information include aligning content with competencies and adapting it to address multiple intelligences and individual learner needs. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983 as cited in Morgan, 2021) points out the importance of designing instruction that taps into different kinds of intelligences. In the context of Teacher C on multiple intelligences, she mentioned that:

“Aligning activities in the competencies, kasi dapat yung mga competencies ay kaya at nasusukat ang Multiple Intelligences ng mga learner mo. Doon talaga ako nagtagal.”

Teachers are concerned not just with content delivery but ensuring learning outcomes are measurable and aligned with students' unique abilities. The teacher's commitment to creating competency-based and diverse activities aligns with this model.

Theme 3: Professional Learning, Motivation, and Time Management Challenges.

The theme highlights the practical and emotional burden, as experienced among teacher-developers, in developing modules. The struggles stemmed from the lack of formal training in instructional design as well as balancing multiple responsibilities. Teacher Identity and Emotional Labor describe developing instructional materials as technical and emotional tasks (Dunn et al., 2025). The tension between professional demands and personal capacities is a central challenge of modern teaching. As mentioned in Teacher D:

“The major challenges I've encountered in developing a learning module are the gathering of materials and time of preparation. I have to exert motivation and time in this module even though I have other tasks.”

This reflection illustrates the internal motivation and resilience required to persist in the task. Moreover, it also reveals how teachers engage in complex cognitive, emotional, and pedagogical work as they develop learner-centered materials.

Suggestions and Recommendations Offered Among Developers

The following were suggested and recommended by the instructional material developers of Project SERVES:

1. Provision of appropriate seminars, training and workshops in designing modules as the responsibility of materials development is tedious and requires ample of time.
2. Policymakers should consider no class disruption as teacher-developers handle classes which hamper them from concentrating on the assigned duties.
3. Access to references and resource materials for meaningful and content-rich instructional materials.
4. Designing modules that caters individual learning needs, thus, promotes inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of instructional material developers under Project SERVES, revealing the multifaceted nature of module development as a cognitive, emotional, and pedagogical endeavor. Teachers navigate complex challenges in creating inclusive, learner-centered materials aligned with diverse student needs and curriculum competencies, all while facing practical constraints such as inadequate training, limited resources, and competing responsibilities. Ultimately, sustainable and effective module development requires arrays of support such as specialized training, sufficient time, accessible resources, and inclusive design frameworks that sustain teacher-developers' motivation and capacity to produce high-quality instructional materials.

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