

The Essence of Experience: A Study of Pedagogical Adaptability Of Veteran Teachers

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Abstract

In today's fast-changing educational environment, teachers hold a vital responsibility in shaping the way we learn and equipping us for an increasingly complex future. This study explored the essence of experience through the lens of pedagogical adaptability in veteran teachers, examining how long-standing educators adjusted their teaching practices to meet evolving educational demands, student needs, and institutional expectations. Drawing on qualitative interviews, the research highlighted the strategies, reflective practices, and core beliefs that enable experienced teachers to remain effective and responsive in dynamic learning environments. The findings revealed that pedagogical adaptability in veteran teachers is deeply rooted in a balance between accumulated professional wisdom and a continuous willingness to learn and innovate. This adaptability not only sustains their relevance but also enriches the learning experience for diverse student populations.

Keywords: veteran teachers; pedagogical adaptability; teaching experience; educational change; reflective practice; instructional strategies; professional development; classroom innovation; teacher resilience; student-centered learning

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, teachers play a crucial role in shaping how we learn and prepare for a complex future (Srivastava, 2023). Veteran teachers bring valuable experience in adapting to shifts in policies, paradigms, and student needs. Yet, there remains a gap in understanding how they experience and navigate the demands of ongoing pedagogical change (Herrick, 2023).

Pedagogical adaptability among veteran teachers is a growing global concern, reflecting their ability to adjust to evolving curricula, technology, diverse learners, and changing policies. Despite their rich experience, many face challenges keeping pace with rapid educational shifts, risking misalignment with the needs of 21st-century students (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In the Philippines, a study has shown that veteran teachers may resist changes that affect their autonomy or instructional time, often expressing frustrations with curricular expectations, technology integration, and the growing focus on testing and data collection (Nulada, & Binayao, 2025). While these teachers possess a vast amount of experience and knowledge, their established teaching styles and routines can sometimes impede innovation and the adoption of new teaching methods or technologies (Khalil & Husnin, 2019).

As a new teacher, I've observed how early-career and veteran educators work together in our school. Eager to contribute, I created lesson logs and introduced innovative strategies to boost student engagement. However, a veteran teacher resisted my approach, urging me to stick to traditional methods (Kim, 2015). While I respect their experience and dedication, it's disheartening that my ideas are often dismissed without open discussion. This resistance stifles collaboration and innovation, limiting opportunities for mutual growth. When veteran teachers lack pedagogical adaptability, student engagement and performance can suffer, potentially widening achievement gaps and hindering the development of essential 21st-century skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

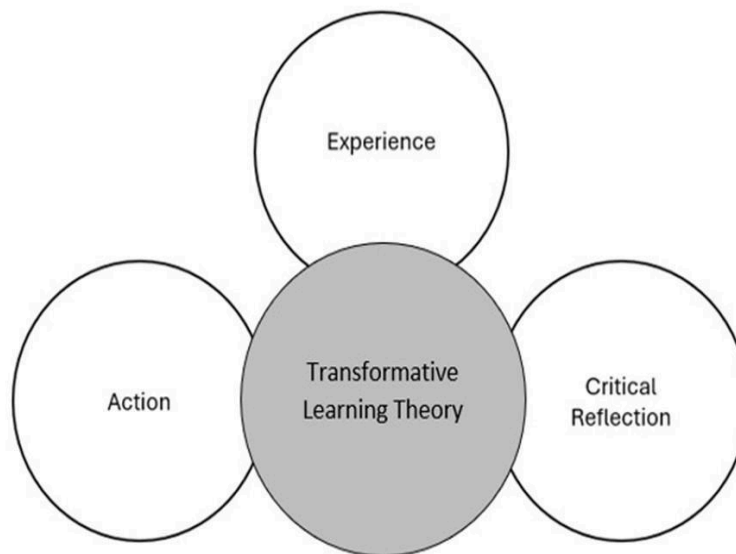
This study was significant as it explored the lived experiences of veteran teachers in adapting to educational changes, offering insights that supported professional growth, instructional innovation, and the development of responsive school cultures that valued experience while embracing change.

This study aimed to explore the essence of pedagogical adaptability, focusing on the lived experiences of veteran teachers.

This study is grounded in several key assumptions that shape its purpose, methodology, and interpretation of findings. It assumes that veteran teachers have first-hand experience in adapting their teaching practices in response to evolving educational demands, including changes in curriculum, student needs, technology, and broader reforms. Additionally, it is assumed that participants are capable of articulating these experiences with honesty and clarity, which is crucial for phenomenological research that depends on reflective, personal narratives. Furthermore, the study assumes that while veteran teachers rely on established methods, they remain committed to adapting their practices to support student learning. Their approaches may differ from those of newer teachers, but these differences are viewed as valuable generational perspectives rather than obstacles. It is also assumed that the school environment including institutional culture, leadership, peer collaboration, and access to professional development significantly influences a teacher's capacity to adapt.

This study is anchored on the Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) which is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference. Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our “line of action.” Once set, we automatically move from one specific activity (mental or behavioural) to another. We have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit our preconceptions, labelling those ideas as unworthy of consideration—aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird, or mistaken. When circumstances permit, transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience. He asserted that adults learn by critically reflecting on their experiences, especially when they encounter challenges that disrupt their usual ways of thinking. Through this process, individuals examine their beliefs, explore new perspectives, and ultimately transform their understanding and behaviour. In this study, reflective discourse is delimited.

Fig. 1. Paradigm of the study



This paradigm of the study helps explain how and why experienced educators can evolve in response to external demands—by their critical reflection and action. Reflective discourse is delimited in the study.

2. Methodology

The study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of veteran teachers. This research was conducted in both private and public schools in Davao City, providing a diverse population of veteran teachers and offering a rich context for understanding the varying degrees of adaptability at work. Participants in the study were selected through purposive sampling, specifically targeting veteran teachers to gain in-depth insights into their pedagogical

adaptability. Veteran teachers were defined as those with 10 or more years of teaching experience, as they were likely to have experienced significant shifts in educational practices, curricula, and institutional expectations over time.

Data were collected through in-person or virtual interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes. Participants were given the option to choose the most convenient time and location for the interview. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accurate data collection. Transcripts of the interviews were then reviewed for consistency and clarity before beginning the analysis.

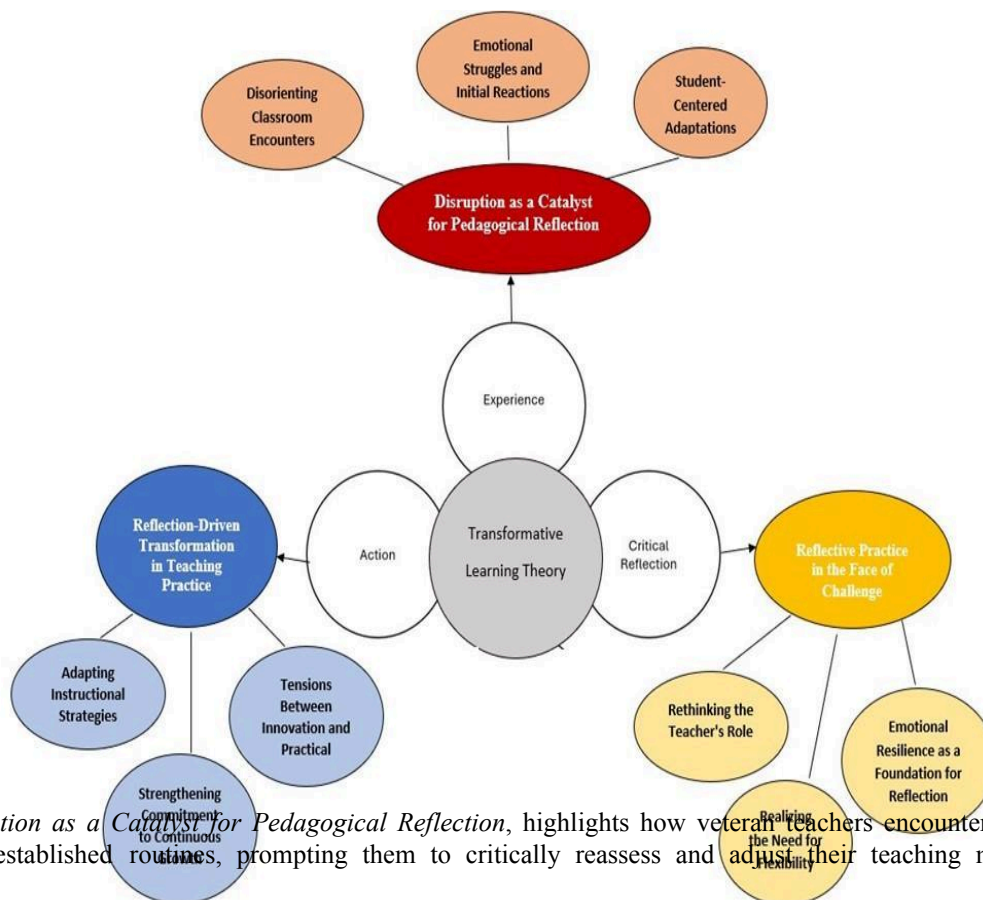
The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allowed for the identification and interpretation of key themes and patterns within the data. Each interview transcript was carefully coded, and recurring themes related to teaching adaptability, experience, and strategies were identified. The analysis followed a systematic process of data immersion, code generation, theme development, and interpretation to ensure a deep understanding of the participants' experiences.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several methods were used. First, member checking allowed participants to review their interview transcripts for accuracy. Second, peer debriefing involved another researcher reviewing the coding and themes to ensure the analysis was accurate. The study also included rich descriptions of the data to provide a clear understanding of participants' experiences and make the findings more transparent. Finally, prolonged engagement in the field helped build trust with participants and ensured that the data collected were meaningful.

3. Results

This chapter presents the emerging themes from the in-depth interviews with six teachers who shared their lived experiences of pedagogical adaptability. Drawing from Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, the data reveal that teachers often undergo significant perspective shifts in response to challenges in the classroom. These shifts are triggered by disorienting dilemmas, followed by critical reflection and the active exploration of new teaching strategies.

Fig. 2. Emergent Themes and Subthemes on Veteran Teachers' Pedagogical Adaptability Anchored on Transformative Learning Theory of Mezirow.



Theme 1 Disruption as a Catalyst for Pedagogical Reflection, highlights how veteran teachers encounter situations that interrupt their established routines, prompting them to critically reassess and adjust their teaching methods. Three

sub-themes emerged under this category: Disorienting Classroom Encounters, refers to unexpected challenges that confront and test their long-held assumptions. Emotional Struggles and Initial Reactions, captures the internal responses of teachers, such as stress, frustration, or confusion, as they process these disruptions. Student-centered Adaptations, illustrates how these challenges ultimately lead to pedagogical shifts toward more flexible, inclusive, and student-centered practices, emphasizing empathy, accessibility, and deeper student engagement.

“I had a student who struggled to stay engaged during class discussions and would easily lose focus.”

“I had two students with special conditions—they were delayed in both speaking and learning”

“I have this one student who cannot do physical performances because she has scoliosis and heart problems.”

“I feel hesitant to change my lesson even though need ug changes, ang time is a big factor labi na sa pagplano ug something new ...can be overwhelming usahay unsa man gyud ang mas best para aning mga bataa right there and there nimo i-think, especially kung naga apas naka sa oras and full sched ka. Usahay man gud king mag change ta right away usahay di nato ma follow ang budget sa atong lessons. Usahay ma delay ta so mao ang ginaka worryhan nako ang time. Tapos I’m so worried na ang new method might na work and could be a waste of time, maong usahay di ko confident sa new strategies if right away nako sya i change usahay ang mag resources di tama, usahay mawala naka sa structures sa imong class.”

(I sometimes feel hesitant to change my lesson, even when I know adjustments are needed. Time is a major factor—especially when planning something new. It can feel overwhelming to quickly decide what’s best for the students at that exact moment, particularly when I’m trying to keep up with the schedule and I have a full load. One of my concerns is that making changes on the spot could affect the pacing of the lessons and disrupt the planned flow. Sometimes, it causes delays and that worries me. I also get anxious that the new method might not work and could end up being a waste of time. That’s why I sometimes lack confidence in trying out new strategies right away. At times, the available resources aren’t suitable, or I risk losing the structure and flow of my class. These concerns make it challenging to adapt quickly, even if I know it could benefit the students.)

Theme 2 Reflective Practice in the Face of Challenge, teachers begin to reflect deeply on their practices when faced with challenges. Rethinking the Teacher’s Role, teachers realized the need to move beyond traditional teaching roles and to think and be more responsive facilitators of learning. Realizing the Need for Flexibility, interviews revealed that sticking to instructional practices was ineffective, which prompted a change in mindset toward differentiated instruction. Emotional Resilience as a Foundation for Reflection, emotional resilience enables veteran teachers to face challenges with openness, fostering deeper reflection and thoughtful changes in their teaching practices.

“Naa ko usahay.... personally as... i judge myself, naa mga times na pag ma observe nako na pila na ka days ang isa ka lesson ma question gyud nako akong self “asa man ko nagkulang ani uy, gihatag naman nako akong tanan”. So akong buhaton ana kay pag di na gyud makaya sa book na activities kay mag research gyud ko ana”

(Sometimes, as a teacher, I find myself judging my own performance. When I notice that a lesson is taking several days to complete, I question myself, 'Where did I fall short? I’ve already given my best. So what I’ll do is, if I really can’t manage the activities in the book, I’ll do my own research.)

“My usual response is to pause and then observe the students, what seems to be a problem ‘and then ask them how I could help them.”

“I think about staying calm, finding what’s confusing them, and explaining it in a new, easier way that makes more sense to them.”

“Usually, when I prepare lesson plans and I immediately notice that my students are disinterested, I shift right away. I don’t strictly follow the lesson plan—I adapt to their present needs.”

“There was this instance where after giving the individual activity, I can hear some noises coming from the students asking about the activity, I guess they did not understand what they have to do during that activity, what I did was I stopped them from what they are doing and then asked them why they are making the noises and what is their problem. and then after hearing them, I changed the activity from individual to pair.”

Theme 3 Reflection-Driven Transformation in Teaching Practice, teachers implemented changes in their teaching practices as a result of their reflections, signalling growth and transformation. Adapting Instructional Strategies, teachers modified their pacing, tasks, communication, and engagement methods to better support individual learner needs. Strengthening Commitment to Continuous Growth, many expressed a desire to keep learning, seek support, and improve their practice through ongoing reflection and professional development. Tensions Between Innovation and Practical Constraints reflects the internal conflict between the desire to innovate and external barriers such as time, curriculum pacing, confidence, and resource limitations.

“For me, I use a variety of teaching methods that change over time depending on the students. If I stick only to discussion and traditional ways, they get bored—and you can see it on their faces.”

“I mentioned earlier about my student who cannot participate during our PE performances. Instead of her doing the performances, I have given her other tasks which I think she could do and which are still connected to the lessons that we have discussed. She learned to make use of her talent, though she has some limitations on her physical abilities, she showed to her classmates that she still has this skill and other talents which she can portray herself.”

“As teachers, we have to address these differences because if we rely on only one method, only one group of students will benefit. That’s why we need to explore multiple teaching strategies, especially now in the 21st century where students are more tech-savvy compared to our generation. Why not use their strengths and explore innovative ways to learn? There are many online resources and websites that we can integrate into our lessons. “

“My teaching views on teaching approaches have evolved from teaching centric. Instead of focusing more on the teacher, I am more into the student centric perspective. I have realized that effective teaching is not about the teachers, it is about the students doing and experiencing.”

“Hesitation to change lessons due to time pressure and workload”

“Fear that new strategies may fail or cause delay”

As a researcher and fellow educator, I am aware of the challenge’s veteran teachers face in adapting to rapid changes in curriculum and technology. My professional background in basic education gives me insight into classroom realities, which shaped my interest in exploring how experienced teachers navigate these shifts. I recognize that my proximity to the topic may influence interpretation, and I have employed bracketing and member checking to minimize bias.

The participants in this study are veteran teachers from public and private schools with over a decade of classroom experience. Their standpoint is rooted in long-term immersion in traditional teaching practices, yet they are also navigating the demands of modern education reforms. Their lived experiences provide rich, first hand insights into the realities and complexities of pedagogical adaptability.

4. Discussion

Theme 1: Disruption as a Catalyst for Pedagogical Reflection. - Adults like the veteran teachers have acquired a coherent body of experience—associations, concepts, values, feelings, and conditioned responses frames of reference that define their life world (Mezirow, 1991). Experienced teachers are believed to have combined years of service and a repertoire of

classroom skills and strategies. (Hagger & McIntyre, 2000) However, little attention has surrounded veteran teachers who are more resilient but often more resistant to change (Appova & Arbaugh, 2018; Day & Gu, 2009). Thus, based on the interview conducted, it relieved the sub themes of disorienting classroom encounters and emotional struggles and initial reactions as well as the student-centered adaptations of the veteran teachers. Teachers encountered challenging situations that disrupted their usual teaching habits and expectations (Panther, AlleeHerndon, Perrotta & Cannon, 2021).

Theme 2: Reflective Practice in the Face of Challenge. (Mezirow, 1991) in his Transformative Learning theory asserted that adults learn by critically reflecting on their experiences, especially when they encounter challenges that disrupt their usual ways of thinking. These experiences led teachers to deeply question their assumptions, leading to new understandings of teaching and learning. Thus, revealed in the interview, the emerging sub themes of rethinking the teacher's roles, realizing the need for flexibility and emotional resilience as a foundation for reflection. Given veteran teachers' influence on school culture and environment, especially among newer educators, more research is necessary for understanding their unique needs to foster conducive environments for adaptation which promotes positive influence on school environment and culture (Day & Gu, 2009; Dreer, 2021; Gore & Rickards, 2020; Lowe et al., 2019).

Theme 3: Reflection-Driven Transformation in Teaching Practice. In the Transformative Learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) of which is the process of exploring experience and critical reflection, individuals examine their beliefs, explore new perspectives, and ultimately transform their understanding and behavior. Thus, revealed in the International Journal of Research Publication interview, the sub themes of adapting instructional strategies, strengthening and commitment to continuous growth and tensions between innovation and practical constraints. Teachers have a key role to play in enhancing and ensuring the performance of sustainability education in schools and institutions (Alzoraiki, Ahmad, Ateeq, Naji, Almaamari, & Beshr, 2023)

Looking ahead, future research can take a closer look at the environments that help veteran teachers thrive. This study confirmed that experienced educators are indeed capable of adapting, but their ability to do so often depends on the kind of support they receive. It would be valuable to explore how school culture, leadership approaches, and opportunities for collaboration with peers impact their willingness and capacity to change. Since we also assumed that external support systems play a big role, future studies might focus on what kinds of school settings truly encourage long-term adaptability. It would also be worthwhile to examine how the unique perspectives of veteran teachers can bring fresh ideas into team teaching or mentoring younger colleagues. These directions not only deepen our understanding of adaptability but also highlight the importance of including veteran voices in shaping the future of education.

Building on the challenges uncovered in this study, several important avenues for future research and practical action emerge. One key area to explore is how school leadership and institutional support influence veteran teachers' willingness and capacity to adapt their teaching practices. Understanding which leadership styles and support mechanisms foster a positive environment for experienced teachers to innovate could provide valuable insights for improving school culture and teacher development.

Another promising direction for research involves examining the effectiveness of differentiated professional development programs tailored specifically for veteran teachers. A guiding question might be: "What kinds of training models best help seasoned educators gain confidence and competence in using modern, 21st-century teaching tools and strategies?" Answers to this could inform the design of more personalized and meaningful training that respects teachers' extensive experience while encouraging growth and adaptation.

In practical terms, schools can take steps to support veteran teachers by offering flexible schedules, creating opportunities for peer collaboration, and establishing mentorship programs where teachers can share best practices and explore new methods together. Additionally, strengthening support for inclusive education is crucial—this includes providing teachers with targeted training and resources to effectively address the needs of diverse learners, including those with behavioral challenges and special needs. These measures can help translate the findings of this study into tangible improvements that benefit both educators and their students.

This study underscores the importance of pedagogical adaptability among veteran teachers in early childhood education. It is recommended that professional development programs be designed to build on their existing experience while introducing relevant innovations in teaching practice. Schools should foster a culture that values reflective practice and continuous learning, enabling veteran educators to adapt meaningfully to evolving classroom demands. Encouraging their active involvement in mentorship and policy-making can further enhance their sense of professional agency and ensure that educational reforms are informed by practical classroom experience. Moreover, providing targeted support for the

integration of technology can help bridge gaps in digital fluency, ensuring that veteran teachers remain effective and confident in modern learning environments.

This study reveals that veteran teachers possess a unique capacity for pedagogical adaptability shaped by years of classroom experience, reflective practice, and deep understanding of child development. Despite the challenges posed by evolving educational demands and technological advancements, these educators continue to adapt by integrating new strategies with established methods. Their adaptability is not only a testament to their professional resilience but also a valuable asset to early childhood education. Recognizing and supporting this adaptability is essential in ensuring that their experience remains a dynamic force in shaping responsive and effective teaching practices.

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