

# Bridging the Gap: Experiences of Teachers Applying Skill-Building Activities for Grade 5 Learners

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**Abstract:** This study explores the experiences, challenges, and insights of teachers in applying skill-building activities amidst increasing academic demands in elementary education. A qualitative research design was employed using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with elementary teachers. Data were collected from five individual interviews and a focus group comprising five participants. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns and themes related to teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and insights. Findings revealed that skill-building activities positively impacted learner engagement and confidence, with students exhibiting improved critical thinking and adaptability. However, challenges included insufficient materials, time limitations, and resistance from stakeholders. Teachers employed strategies such as resource improvisation, collaboration with colleagues, and differentiated instruction to address these challenges. Insights highlighted the importance of aligning activities with real-world applications, fostering collaboration, and providing continuous support to learners.

The study emphasized the transformative potential of skill-building activities in enhancing learner capacity to meet academic demands. Teachers' experiences indicate the need for institutional support, stakeholder engagement, and professional development to optimize the implementation of such activities.

**Keywords:** Skill-Building, Elementary Education, Academic Demands, Critical Thinking, Learner Engagement, Teacher Strategies.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As learners transition to more challenging grade levels, such as Grade 5, they face increasing academic demands that test their ability to adapt and build resilience. Many students experience stress and disorganization due to these rising pressures, which can hinder their problem-solving skills and overall development. This study explores teachers' experiences with skill-building activities designed to strengthen Grade 5 learners' capacities to manage these challenges effectively.

Students often felt overwhelmed by increasing academic workloads, which impacted their well-being and motivation, especially amid challenges like the pandemic. Excessive demands caused stress and burnout, but building academic self-efficacy helped manage these pressures. Skill-building activities were important for developing students' resilience and ability to handle rising demands, particularly as they approached higher grades. This study explored teachers' experiences with these activities, the challenges they faced, and how these efforts improved learners' adaptability and capacity.

This study aimed to explore teachers' experiences in using skill-building activities to help students manage increasing academic demands. It highlights the importance of creativity and engaging methods to enhance students' abilities and resilience. The findings offer valuable insights for rethinking traditional teaching approaches and provide ideas for effectively implementing and expanding these activities in classrooms.

The reviewed literature emphasizes the importance and benefits of skill-building in education, especially as students face increasing academic demands. These demands stem from more advanced coursework, the need for diverse skills, and heavier workloads. Skill-based learning helps students improve not only specific academic abilities but also critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. By promoting active engagement and real-world application, this approach enhances understanding and retention, ultimately enriching the overall learning experience.

This study was based on the Constructivist Learning Theory by Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasized that learners actively built knowledge through experiences, allowing them to better understand and adapt. Skill-building activities aligned with this theory by encouraging learners to engage hands-on with real-world problems, which enhanced comprehension and retention. Additionally, the study drew on the theory of adaptive strategies by J. Philip Grime, which highlighted how individuals and systems adjusted their behaviors to changing circumstances.

## II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach, specifically the phenomenological method, to deeply understand the experiences of fifth-grade learners facing reading difficulties during the pandemic. Through in-depth interviews and detailed observations, the study focused on capturing the students' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors within the specific time and context of the epidemic. Emphasizing the importance of the learners' perspectives and the surrounding environment, this approach provided rich insights into how the students experienced and adapted to their challenges.

This study's foundation rests on ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontology views reality as subjective and constructed by participants, guiding careful interpretation. Epistemology stresses close collaboration with participants to gather authentic knowledge. Axiology involves respecting the value and sensitivity of participant data while acknowledging researcher bias. Methodology reflects these assumptions through ongoing reflection and objective analysis to ensure credible and meaningful findings.

The study used phenomenological analysis to prioritize interpreting participants' meaningful experiences over just hard data. This approach, rooted in narrative inquiry, helped reveal the personal significance within participants' stories by viewing events from their perspectives. Reflection and thematic analysis were key to understanding the lived experiences, with data collection and analysis happening simultaneously for a flexible, in-depth exploration. Phenomenology emphasized the subjective nature of reality and how individuals perceive themselves and their world.

The researcher used purposive sampling to select 10 active Grade 5 teachers with at least three years of experience who were willing to share their insights. Five participated in in-depth interviews, while the other five joined focus group discussions. This sampling method was chosen to enable a small, focused group for gaining detailed understanding and building rapport, allowing the researcher to gather genuine, in-depth information from the most suitable participants.

The study followed seven key steps for data collection: selecting Grade 5 teachers as participants, building rapport and gaining approval from authorities, and purposively sampling 10 teachers with relevant experience. Data was gathered primarily through in-depth interviews with five

teachers and focus group discussions with another five. Pre-designed forms and protocols were used to record data, while potential field challenges like incomplete data were anticipated and managed. Finally, collected data was securely stored in a database to ensure easy access and protection against loss.

The study carefully analyzed data by setting aside personal biases, identifying key statements, and grouping them into themes. It examined both the content and structure of participants' experiences within their context, combining these into a comprehensive description. Thematic content analysis helped reveal patterns in the data while ensuring accurate and faithful representation of participants' perspectives.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first section presents Grade 5 teachers' experiences implementing skill-building activities amid rising academic demands, focusing on two key themes: learner growth and challenges in integration. Teachers observed increased learner engagement and resiliency, but also faced difficulties like balancing curriculum demands, limited resources, diverse learner readiness, resistance to new methods, and the strain on their own well-being.

Despite the many challenges teachers face in integrating skill-building activities, they employ various coping strategies to ensure successful implementation. These include managing time strategically and prioritizing the curriculum, using resources creatively and innovatively, and adapting instruction to meet diverse learner needs. They also foster stakeholder support and promote adaptability, while practicing self-care and collaborating professionally to reduce burnout.

Teachers' experiences reveal that skill-building activities enhance learners' critical thinking, adaptability, and readiness for academic challenges. By tailoring these activities, educators effectively address diverse learner needs. Collaboration among teachers and support from stakeholders play a vital role in overcoming teaching challenges and ensuring the success of these initiatives.

Teachers' experiences with skill-building activities revealed both rewarding outcomes and considerable challenges. They observed increased learner engagement, resilience, and adaptability, with students becoming more active participants in their education. However, implementing these activities also brought difficulties such as limited materials, time constraints, varied learner readiness, and emotional fatigue due to the additional demands on teaching.

To manage these challenges, teachers employed strategic approaches such as time management, resourceful use of materials, and differentiated instruction. They also highlighted the value of fostering stakeholder support—engaging parents and working with school leaders—to overcome resistance and secure essential resources.

Moreover, self-care and peer collaboration were vital in maintaining teacher well-being and effectiveness.

Overall, these experiences underscored the broader impact of skill-building activities. Teachers noted that such practices not only enhanced critical thinking and adaptability but also prepared learners for academic demands through personalized approaches.

Teachers' experiences emphasize the need for professional development that equips them to integrate skill-building into the curriculum while managing common challenges such as limited resources and diverse learner needs. Their coping strategies reveal the importance of institutional support, including adequate resources, flexible schedules, and collaborative platforms.

To support the integration of skill-building activities, Department of Education officials are encouraged to provide clear guidelines, allocate necessary funding, and offer training focused on differentiated instruction and learner engagement. School heads can foster a supportive environment by offering flexible schedules, promoting teacher collaboration, and engaging parents in the value of these activities. Teachers, particularly at the elementary and English levels, can adopt creative instructional strategies, share resources, prioritize self-care, and design tasks that build both academic and life skills. Students are expected to actively participate, collaborate with peers, and apply learned strategies to overcome academic challenges. Lastly, future researchers may examine the long-term effects of skill-building activities, their role in enhancing specific competencies, and the influence of stakeholder support on sustaining these efforts.

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