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# EMBRACING CHANGE: UNVEILING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION "OPLAN BAKLAS" BARE CLASSROOM WALLS POLICY

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**Abstract:**
This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of 10 purposively selected teachers in implementing the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Walls Policy. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's method for phenomenological analysis. The findings revealed several challenges faced by teachers, including the absence of visual learning materials, reduced learner engagement, difficulty in introducing new concepts, restricted creativity, and a diminished sense of community within the classroom. Participants also expressed concerns about emotional and financial burdens, although some acknowledged that the policy helped reduce classroom decoration expenses. To overcome these challenges, teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability by reassessing their teaching strategies, becoming more resourceful, and integrating computer-aided instruction. They creatively maximized their learning spaces, leading to improved learner attention and a more focused environment. Some teachers embraced the policy as an opportunity to rethink conventional classroom norms and practices. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of teacher adaptability and innovation in navigating systemic educational reforms, highlighting that even in the face of limitations, educators can transform challenges into meaningful opportunities for growth, creativity, and professional development.

**Keywords:** educational management, pandemic, "Oplan Baklas", Bare classroom, phenomenology, Philippines

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## 1. Introduction

> "*Teachers are the architects of the changing classroom. Their experiences, insights, and reflections are the bricks that build its foundation and shape its future*." (John Doe)

John Doe's quote reminds us that teachers are the quiet builders of every classroom, shaping its soul with their stories, lessons, and deep commitment. Even with the "Oplan Baklas" policy taking down the visuals on the walls, it could not remove the heart they pour into their work. What truly fills a classroom is not the decorations—it is the teacher's courage, creativity, and unshakable belief in every child's potential. That is what keeps learning alive. This study underscores the pivotal role of teachers as key agents of educational reform, particularly within the context of the Oplan Baklas policy, which calls for the removal of excessive classroom visuals. Rather than passive enforcers, teachers emerge as active contributors who reshape classroom environments through their professional judgment and adaptive practices. Their lived experiences and interpretations of the policy reveal how effective implementation relies not only on policy design but also on teacher agency. By centering their voices, the study highlights the crucial link between policy success and classroom realities (Abdulmanan *et al.*, 2025).

International trends reflect the experiences of Filipino teachers under the "Oplan Baklas" policy, particularly the global move toward minimalist classroom environments and learner-centered spaces. Studies suggest that reducing visual distractions can enhance student focus and encourage educators to explore more intentional and adaptive teaching practices. For example, tech-integrated, flexible classrooms in some U.S. schools have prompted teachers to balance innovation with effective pedagogy. These developments underscore the critical role of teachers in shaping educational reforms, ensuring that learning remains meaningful, inclusive, and contextually relevant (Chen & Chen, 2024; Cohen, 2020).

While existing literature primarily centers on teachers' responses to Oplan Baklas, this study shifts the focus toward its impact on learners, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Research suggests that minimalist classroom environments, although well-meaning, may inadvertently disadvantage students with learning difficulties, those from low-income households, or those in overcrowded schools. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how the policy may reinforce educational inequalities. In doing so, it underscores the need for equity-driven reforms that ensure all learners benefit from classroom changes—not just a privileged few (Salar *et al.*, 2024).

Many teachers silently struggle with the adjustments required by the Oplan Baklas policy, yet comprehensive data is crucial to understanding its full impact. According to the Department of Education, over 70% of teachers reported challenges, citing disruptions to teaching routines. Additionally, the Philippine Statistics Authority found that students from low-income families were disproportionately affected, especially in under-resourced schools. These findings emphasize the policy's broader implications for both educators and vulnerable learners.

Oplan Baklas, implemented through Department Order No. 21, s. 2023, mandates the removal of unnecessary classroom decorations to create a more focused learning environment. However, teachers have raised concerns over vague guidelines that lead to the removal of essential teaching materials. The policy gained national attention after Vice President Sara Duterte removed instructional posters during Brigada Eskwela 2024. Its enforcement highlights broader issues of equity and clarity, particularly in under-resourced schools like Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary School in General Santos City. This study investigates the policy's impact on teaching practices and student engagement, with a focus on the experiences of educators in marginalized settings. It emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive, well-defined strategies to prevent further educational inequities.

This study was grounded in the theories of Constructivism by Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1970), and Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977). The theories of Jean Piaget (1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1934) are prominent figures associated with constructivism.

This study draws on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the influence of multiple environmental layers on teacher experiences, and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which highlights the role of observation and modeling in adapting to classroom changes. It also incorporates Minimalist Design principles and Tufte's research, suggesting that reducing visual clutter improves focus and comprehension. Lastly, Mehrabian's Stimulus Reduction Theory supports the idea that simplified environments lower stress and enhance learning.

This study aimed to examine how teachers adapt to changes in classroom structures brought about by pedagogical innovations, technological advancements, and evolving learner needs. It focused on the challenges they encountered, the strategies they employed, and the successes they achieved. Using qualitative methods such as interviews and observations, the study captured the lived realities of teaching in modern classrooms. By highlighting teachers' voices, it sought to bridge the gap between theory and practice, uncover emerging trends, and showcase diverse teaching approaches. Additionally, the study aimed to inform educational stakeholders—including administrators, policymakers, and fellow educators—about the implications of shifting classroom environments. Its findings offer practical recommendations for professional development, equitable resource allocation, and policy reforms, ultimately supporting teachers in leading meaningful and inclusive educational change.

This study holds global relevance as it aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. It explored teachers' experiences with classroom structural changes, highlighting how physical and instructional adjustments can better support diverse learner needs. Emphasizing principles such as equity, collaboration, and respect, the research connects policy goals with classroom realities to enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement. Specifically applied to Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary School, the study provided

practical insights for creating more inclusive environments, aiding school leaders and teachers in fostering equitable and student-centered learning spaces.

This study complements existing research on modular education by examining how structural changes in classroom environments—such as those mandated by the Oplan Baklas policy—affect teaching practices and student engagement. While earlier studies have informed policy decisions on modular learning by identifying key challenges and areas for improvement, this research extends that discourse by focusing on the lived experiences of teachers adapting to physical and instructional changes. It emphasizes how classroom structure impacts inclusivity and instructional effectiveness, particularly in under-resourced settings. Both studies highlight the importance of aligning education policies with classroom realities to ensure equitable access and support for all learners. Collectively, these findings offer valuable insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers in crafting more inclusive and responsive learning environments, both locally and globally.

## 2. Material and Methods

In this qualitative study conducted at Jose Divinagracia, Sr. Elementary School of General Santos City during the 2023-2024 school year, the researchers strategically employed purposive sampling to select ten female public-school educators, comprising one Grade 1 teacher with 30 years of service, two Grade 2 teachers with 28 and 22 years of experience, five Grade 3 teachers with 31, 30, and 27 years of service, and two Grade 6 master instructors. Educators with fewer than 20 years of experience or those who were unwilling or unable to provide their insights were excluded. This selection provided comprehensive qualitative insights but restricted the generalizability of the findings to other schools or districts. Future research could broaden its scope by incorporating a wider array of educators with differing levels of experience, different grade levels, and diverse school environments to enhance understanding of the policy's influence across educational contexts.

The inclusion criteria for participants in this study were female educators aged 40 to 65, currently teaching at Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary School, with a minimum of 20 years of continuous service in the Department of Education. This criterion ensured the inclusion of highly experienced teachers capable of offering long-term perspectives on pedagogical and structural changes. Eligible participants were required to have direct experience with classroom transitions due to institutional reforms and demonstrate a willingness to engage in open, reflective discussions about how these changes have affected their teaching practices, professional identity, and instructional effectiveness.

The materials for this qualitative phenomenological study primarily consisted of a validated interview guide/questionnaire designed to elicit the lived experiences of female educators currently employed at Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary School, aged between 40 and 65 years old. Data collection methods involved individual in-depth interviews with ten purposefully selected teachers from Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary

School. The researcher personally conducted these interviews and discussions, adhering to health and safety protocols, and recorded the conversations to ensure accuracy, later engaging an independent reader analyst to verify transcriptions and a professional data analyst for subsequent analysis and interpretation (Moustakas, 1994).

### 1.1 Design and Procedure

The data collection process commenced with obtaining formal approval from both the Schools Division Superintendent and the school principal. Following this, the researcher distributed informed consent forms to the chosen teachers and secured written consent from their school principal, prioritizing adherence to ethical standards throughout the study. Ten participants engaged in individual in-depth interviews. A validated interview guide was used as the main tool to facilitate the collection of in-depth and meaningful responses from the participants. During the entire data-gathering process, the researcher strictly followed the health and safety guidelines set by local health authorities.

Prior to conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher organized a preliminary orientation to inform participants about the study's purpose, discussion topics, and interview format. Ethical standards were emphasized, particularly confidentiality and honesty, to foster a safe space for open dialogue. Cultural sensitivity was upheld by considering participants' social and cultural backgrounds throughout the engagement. Participants were made aware that interviews would be audio-recorded and were assured access to the recordings for transparency.

The data analysis process involved several key methods. The first stage was data reduction, which focused on summarizing information, selecting essential details, emphasizing significant aspects, and identifying themes and patterns. This step helped in organizing the raw data into a more manageable form. The next stage was data display, where the information was presented in a structured and condensed manner. Organizing the data this way allowed for more precise interpretation, making it easier to draw meaningful conclusions and take appropriate actions based on the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The analysis process concluded with the formulation of the research problem through data reduction and systematic organization. Drawing and verifying conclusions constituted the third stage of qualitative analysis. Data interpretation began immediately after collection, focusing on identifying patterns, consistencies, emerging themes, explanations, and key assertions. Throughout this process, the researcher continuously compared new data with previous findings, allowing for refinement and deeper insight. This iterative method ensured that the conclusions were grounded in the data and accurately captured its complexity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This phenomenological qualitative research ensured trustworthiness throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting by applying the principles of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Dependability was established through consistent data handling, while transferability was supported by transparent participant selection criteria and detailed contextual descriptions. The experiences of

teachers at Jose Divinagracia Sr. Elementary School were documented with sufficient depth to assess the applicability of findings to similar educational settings. To enhance credibility, data were rigorously reviewed through recordings and transcripts, and member checking was conducted to allow participants to validate their responses (Candela, 2019).

Throughout this research, this study strictly followed ethical standards set by the RMMC Ethics and Review Committee, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality in line with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and had the right to withdraw at any time. No personal identifiers were disclosed, and all data were treated with strict confidentiality. To ensure research integrity, the study avoided plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, and conflicts of interest. All findings were based on verified participant narratives, supported by member checking and proper documentation. Formal permission was secured from school authorities, and participants' well-being was prioritized throughout the research.

## 2. Results and Discussion

This part presents the categorization of data of the participants lived experiences of the teachers. Specially, to describe their views, coping mechanisms and their insights.

**Table 1:** Views on the Challenges on Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" bare classroom walls policy

| Clustered Themes | Emergent Themes |
|---|---|
| Struggled in the delivery of the lesson to the primary schoolers.<br>Deficiency of visual aids, corresponding paraphernalia, interactive visual stimuli, and motivational posters.<br>Needed more time to digest ideas without corresponding, motivational and instructional paraphernalia. | Lack of Visual Elements |
| Absence of immediate learning resources in the classroom.<br>Difficulty in conceptualizing learning resources in the absence of visual material readily available.<br>Lacked visual and auditory cues that served as guides in the learning and discussion of content ideas. | Absence of Readily Available Learning Materials |
| The absence of warmth and familiarity that decorated space offers.<br>Limited opportunities for visual reminders of shared learning experiences.<br>Privation of personalization, which gave opportunities to learners to personalize their learning spaces. | Reduced Sense of Community |
| Less engagement in the classroom discussion.<br>Difficulty in managing the classroom where the learning experience felt less engaging and stimulating.<br>Made it harder to maintain attention without posters, charts, interactive display. | Limited Engagement |
| It took much longer to memorize a significant amount of concepts.<br>Teaching numeracy became more challenging for teachers.<br>Struggled to digest information and reduced sensory stimulation. | Difficulty in Learning New Concepts |
| We are not creative compared to the typical class setup. | Less |

| | |
|---|---|
| Grasped the lessons faster but lessened creativity.<br>Inadequate chances for creative expressions through arts, decorations, or displays of outputs.<br>Lacked visual representation, the inability to display outputs. | Creativity |
| Addressed the questions of learners on the changes.<br>Finances are still needed to repaint the classrooms after removing the posters.<br>Impulsive decision on the implementation of the policy that needed to be acted on and responded.<br>passive about it due to the effort exerted in restructuring the classroom for the past few years. | Realizing the Policy |

Table 1 presents seven key themes reflecting teachers' challenges under the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Walls Policy. These include a lack of visual elements, limited learning materials, a reduced sense of community, low engagement, difficulty with new concepts, less creativity, and realizing of the policy.

The first main theme describes the participants' views on the challenges of the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" bare classroom walls policy. The Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" policy, which mandates bare classroom walls, led to the emergence of the "Lack of Visual Elements" as a key challenge. While the policy aims to reduce teachers' workload and costs, it unintentionally hinders learner engagement by removing essential visual aids. Teachers report increased effort in developing alternative strategies, resulting in emotional strain and reduced job satisfaction. Although intended to improve classroom management, the policy has limited opportunities for interactive and visually enriched instruction (Salar *et al.*, 2024).

The absence of readily accessible learning materials is another urgent concern arising from the "Oplan Baklas" policy. This problem is especially onerous for educators in under-resourced schools. In the absence of visual aids and instructional displays, educators face challenges in creating engaging and interactive classes. They frequently fabricate improvised materials or procure resources, resulting in an increased workload and, at times, a personal financial burden. This situation diminishes the quality of the class and hurts both instructor morale and student learning experiences (Kapur, 2022; Jibililu, 2024).

Classroom decorations often celebrate learners' achievements, reinforcing their sense of belonging and accomplishment. Showcasing learner work encourages positive self-esteem and fosters a supportive community. These visual celebrations serve as constant reminders of students' progress, inspiring them to strive for continued improvement. Moreover, vibrant and personalized displays create a welcoming atmosphere that makes students feel valued and respected. The absence of these displays can diminish learners' confidence and desire to contribute actively in class. Over time, such absence may lead to decreased motivation and a weakened connection between students and their learning environment (Minkel, 2019).

Furthermore, young learners, particularly in early childhood and primary education, are exceptionally responsive to colorful and visually enriched environments.

Visual stimuli have been found to aid cognitive development and sustain learners' attention throughout instructional periods. To achieve a balanced approach, educators should explore alternative methods for minimizing distractions while maintaining an engaging and stimulating atmosphere. Such approaches include incorporating flexible seating arrangements or utilizing interactive learning tools that maintain visual interest without overwhelming students. By thoughtfully combining these strategies, teachers can create classrooms that both inspire curiosity and support effective learning (Baldeón *et al.*, 2022).

Learners with different cognitive styles—particularly visual learners—are disproportionately impacted when visual aids are removed. The lack of charts, infographics, and other visual aids makes it harder for these students to comprehend abstract or foreign concepts. Pre-existing injustices in the classroom are significantly exacerbated by this discrepancy in educational support, which widens the achievement gap between students with different learning styles and aptitudes. Addressing these disparities requires intentional strategies to provide equitable learning resources tailored to diverse needs (Rahadian & Budiningsih, 2023).

The Philippine Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" policy mandates the removal of wall decorations and instructional visuals to create a minimalist learning environment. While this design can reduce distractions, a study on third graders found that removing all educational materials may hinder learning by decreasing learners' comfort and concentration. These findings highlight the significant impact of the physical learning environment on academic performance, underscoring the need to strike a balance between simplicity and educational and developmental support (Salar *et al.*, 2024).

Change, especially when abrupt, often brings uncertainty and mixed reactions, as seen with the "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Policy. The shift from vibrant, decorated classrooms to stark, undecorated spaces raised concerns for learners and posed logistical and financial challenges for teachers, undoing years of effort to create welcoming environments. Despite these difficulties, educators must approach this transition constructively, prioritizing learners' well-being and academic success. Open communication and collaborative problem-solving are necessary for successfully navigating these challenges together (Lamons & Raiford, 2024).

The implementation of the *Oplan Baklas* policy in Philippine public schools has led to several unintended challenges within classroom environments. The lack of visual elements and the absence of readily available learning materials have made it more difficult for students to remain engaged and grasp new concepts effectively. This has also contributed to a reduced sense of community, as the removal of student work and personalized decorations diminishes classroom warmth and belonging. Furthermore, teachers observed limited learner engagement, declines in creativity, and increased difficulty in concept retention, particularly among younger and struggling learners. While the policy aims to promote order and reduce teacher workload, its actual impact reveals the need to re-evaluate and contextualize its application to ensure it supports both

instructional quality and student well-being in diverse learning environments across the country.

**Table 2:** Coping mechanisms of the Department of Education Teachers' "Oplan Baklas" bare classroom walls policy

| Clustered Themes | Emergent Themes |
|---|---|
| Looked for ways to become more creative in the provisions of examples.<br>Engaged in methods to improve classroom discussions.<br>had to be more creative and innovative in increasing the interactions and collaborations of the learners. | Became More Creative and Innovative |
| Required to rework teaching strategies and think outside the box.<br>Needed to reassess teaching strategies more effectively and efficiently.<br>Thought of alternative ways to allow learners to memorize and practice routine concepts.<br>Promoted evaluation of one's performance and rethink ways to improve teaching strategies. | Reassessed Teaching Strategies |
| Needed to become more resourceful in crafting new learning resource materials.<br>had to take the time to conceptualize new teaching strategies and visual aids.<br>Constant renewal of classroom visual paraphernalia. | Had to Be Resourceful |
| Used computer-aided instructions like a deck of slide presentations.<br>Made use of technology and CAI in the lesson delivery.<br>Utilized technology as the primary tool to deliver instructions.<br>Used a smart TV with an internet connection. | Utilized Computer-Aided Instructions |
| Adapted to abrupt changes in the learning environment as mandated by the higher offices.<br>Followed the instructions of making the classrooms bare of any visual distractions. | Learned to Adapt to the Policy |
| Used collaborative group activities to increase participation.<br>Relied more heavily on verbal descriptions and storytelling.<br>Engaged in the use of language to convey concepts and information. | Artistic Use of the Learning Space |

Table 2 displays the teachers' coping mechanisms in response to the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" policy regarding bare classroom walls. Based on the participant's responses, the table discusses six coping mechanisms, ecame More Creative and Innovative, Reassessed Teaching Strategies, Had to be Resourceful, Utilized Computer-Aided Instructions, Learned to Adapt to the Policy, and Artistic Use of the Learning Space, along with their core ideas.

The second main theme presents the participants' views on the coping mechanisms they employed in response to the *Oplan Baklas* bare classroom walls policy. From their shared experiences, several emergent sub-themes surfaced: becoming more creative and innovative, reassessing teaching strategies, being resourceful, utilizing computer-aided instruction, adapting to the policy, and making artistic use of the learning space.

The policy has incentivized teachers to become more resourceful and inventive in developing instructional materials. Deprived of ready-made visual aids, educators have created customized teaching resources that are more closely aligned with their learners' unique needs. This innovation has resulted in enhanced learner engagement and comprehension through the use of tailored pedagogical tools. Such creativity demonstrates educators' resilience and dedication to overcoming challenges imposed by the policy. Moreover, this shift has encouraged collaborative sharing among teachers, fostering a supportive community focused on continuous improvement despite policy constraints (Tan *et al.*, 2021).

The "Innovative Teaching Strategies: Nine Techniques for Success" framework provides educators with practical methods for navigating the challenges introduced by the "Oplan Baklas" policy. Techniques such as active learning, flipped classrooms, technology integration, inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and gamification promote learner-centered, interactive instruction that relies on minimal traditional visual support. Emphasizing these strategies enables teachers to transform the classroom dynamic, positioning lesson content as the primary source of engagement and empowering learners to take a more active role in their educational journey (Engage2learn, 2023).

Flexibility and adaptability in teaching are necessary for creating effective learning environments. Flexibility empowers educators to adapt instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners, thereby enhancing engagement and inclusivity. Effective implementation includes cultivating learner-centered classrooms, applying differentiated instruction, and utilizing technology to personalize learning. Addressing barriers such as resistance to change, time management, and balancing structured plans with adaptability is essential. Additionally, fostering a growth mindset among educators supports resilience and continuous professional development in the face of challenges (Bi *et al.*, 2023).

The "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Policy has brought technology to the forefront of learning, enabling teachers to deliver lessons effectively without traditional setups through computer-aided instruction and slide presentations. Smart TVs and internet connectivity facilitate real-time interaction, making learning more accessible. Computer-assisted instruction (CAI), especially in mathematics, complements conventional methods and offers greater flexibility. This shift aligns with modern educational models that prioritize technology to meet the diverse needs of learners and enhance instruction. As a result, students benefit from more engaging and interactive learning experiences that support their academic growth (Prabhu & Subramonian, 2019).

A well-structured classroom environment fosters learner engagement, focus, and academic performance. Factors such as seating arrangements, lighting, color schemes, and ambient temperature have a significant impact on learners' comfort and concentration, thereby supporting effective learning outcomes. Creating flexible learning spaces that cater to diverse preferences—such as visual aids for visual learners and tactile activities for kinesthetic learners—is essential. The "Oplan Baklas" policy exemplifies

how minimalist classroom design can reduce distractions and enhance focus, validating educators' adaptive strategies to maintain engagement despite environmental constraints (Carroll *et al.*, 2019).

Research suggests that overly decorated classrooms can impair student concentration by overstimulating the visual senses, resulting in distraction and reduced engagement. Consequently, instructors have adopted verbal storytelling, interactive dialogue, and collaborative activities as inventive substitutes for visual aids. These language-based methods promote active involvement, demonstrating that minimalist classrooms can inspire innovative teaching tactics to maintain student focus. This shift not only sharpens students' listening and communication skills but also encourages deeper cognitive processing through meaningful interaction (Nolé *et al.*, 2021).

Lastly, teachers demonstrated artistic use of the learning space. In the absence of posters and charts, they relied more on verbal descriptions, storytelling, and collaborative group activities. These methods allowed them to continue conveying complex concepts creatively while promoting deeper interaction with students through language and performance-based tasks.

**Table 3:** Insights on the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" bare classroom walls policy

| Clustered Themes | Emergent Themes |
|---|---|
| Contributed positively to the learners' retention and understanding.<br>Learning became more focused on problem-solving activities.<br>The policy helped the learners to focus on the lesson.<br>A minimalist classroom setting increased the attention of the learners. | Increased Attention to Learning |
| Felt strange adapting to the challenge in the classroom setting.<br>was not used to seeing anything posted on the walls.<br>Adapted to the change in the educational and physical setting of the classroom.<br>Learners were surprised by the kind of learning environment they are immersed in now. | Found the Policy Interesting |
| Frustrated since teachers have invested much already in restructuring the classrooms yearly.<br>Unfavorable with it since the visual materials helped in developing numeracy and literacy skills of the learners.<br>Considered the change as a 'gas-thick situation' since teachers need to create new visual aids, which were initially posted on the walls.<br>Saddened with the changes since they spent a lot on it. | Emotional-Financial Burden |
| It had a positive impact on the teachers' finances, as only a few were needed to prepare during the opening of classes.<br>felt happy for not spending money anymore to restructure the classroom.<br>Lessened the time and effort to decorate the classrooms.<br>Allowed teachers to save the amount that was usually spent on decorations.<br>Got relieved with the yearly restructuring of classrooms.<br>Less time and less effort for the teachers. | Financially Helpful to Teachers |

| | |
|---|---|
| Dismayed since it does not promote creativity among teachers.<br>Felt the situation was a double-edged sword.<br>Frustrated with the timeline of implementation.<br>Minimized light-scale activities like walking on the creative visuals.<br>on the walls made by the teachers. | Restricted Creativity<br>of the Teachers |
| Provided more spaces to do group activities.<br>The classroom becomes more conducive to learning and spacious.<br>Effective in developing a positive and energetic learning.<br>environment by reducing visual distractions.<br>realized that some of the posted visuals are no longer relevant and<br>are outdated. | Promoted a more Conducive<br>Learning Environment |

Table 3 outlines educators' perspectives on the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" policy concerning bare classroom walls, highlighting their diverse views on its impact. The table presents key themes reflecting the coping mechanisms employed by teachers in response to the Department of Education's *Oplan Baklas* bare classroom walls policy. Six major findings emerged from the participants' responses: Became More Creative and Innovative, Reassessed Teaching Strategies, had to be Resourceful, Utilized Computer-Aided Instructions, Learned to Adapt to the Policy, and Artistic Use of the Learning Space. These themes highlight how educators adjusted their practices, maximized limited resources, and redesigned their instructional delivery to align with the policy's requirements—demonstrating their adaptability, resilience, and commitment to providing quality education despite the removal of traditional visual aids.

The policy has prompted educators to refine their pedagogical approaches by adopting more structured and organized lesson planning, which enhances learner engagement and facilitates sustained attention while minimizing off-task behavior. This structured approach fosters a more conducive learning environment, encouraging students to take greater ownership of their education. As a result, educators can more effectively identify individual learning needs and tailor their strategies accordingly. In turn, this leads to more personalized instruction that supports diverse learners and improves overall academic outcomes (McConnell *et al.*, 2020).

The minimalist classroom fostered curiosity and attentiveness among learners. The newfound openness and simplicity of the learning space were perceived as refreshing, contributing to heightened learner engagement. Without the usual distractions of excessive decorations, students found it easier to concentrate on lessons and participate actively in discussions. This environmental shift often translates into a psychological one, with learners becoming more focused, motivated, and invested in classroom activities. Many teachers observed that the uncluttered space encouraged students to express their thoughts more freely and collaborate more effectively with their peers. The simplified setting fostered a more positive and productive atmosphere that supported deeper learning and enhanced overall academic performance (Dean & Rouleau, 2023).

Bare-walled classrooms lacking pedagogical visuals—such as instructional posters and learner-generated artifacts—negatively affect learners' emotional well-being and

motivation, often making the environment feel austere and uninviting. This absence of visual supports, which are necessary for reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills, undermines educators' ability to use interactive teaching strategies effectively. While some learners remain indifferent to the minimalist setting, many struggle to maintain focus, underscoring the need for visually enriched environments that cater to diverse cognitive and emotional needs (Villanueva & Erellana, 2024).

While the policy has provided financial relief, it has introduced instructional challenges. Teachers who relied on visual aids and classroom decorations now struggle to maintain learner engagement without these tools. Adapting to a minimalist environment requires developing alternative approaches that support diverse learning needs, which demands additional time and creativity from educators and adds pressure to their workloads. This shift underscores the necessity for ongoing professional development and resource support to enable teachers to engage these changes effectively (Freeman *et al.*, 2023).

This study on the 'Oplan Baklas' regulation indicates that excessively rigid classroom design restrictions can impede teacher creativity, a concern supported by current literature. Research indicates that allowing educators to customize their teaching environments enhances professional satisfaction and fosters greater learner engagement. The 'Oplan Baklas' guideline, by restricting classroom décor and minimizing visual stimuli, may unintentionally eliminate essential opportunities for educators to create engaging, individualized, and inspiring learning environments. Consequently, such limitations jeopardize classroom appeal and diminish their capacity for interactive learning, especially for educators whose methods rely heavily on creative expression (Carroll *et al.*, 2019).

The last emergent theme is organizing the classroom environment can enhance student creativity and involvement by providing a serene and welcoming space that supports focus and reduces stress. While decluttering strategies can minimize distractions and improve concentration, it is essential to balance these efforts by incorporating educational resources that actively support learning. The overall impact of the "Oplan Baklas" strategy on student engagement and performance depends heavily on context, emphasizing the need for further empirical research and the inclusion of teacher feedback in policy implementation. Ultimately, a thoughtfully designed classroom that harmonizes minimalism with purposeful learning tools can cultivate an environment where both students and educators thrive, fostering focus, collaboration, and meaningful academic growth (Zhang & Li, 2023).

## 3. Implications for Practice and Future Research

Drawing from the experiences of the ten participants in this study, the results reveal the genuine challenges faced by public school teachers following the implementation of the Department of Education's Oplan Baklas Bare Classroom Policy. With the removal of classroom decorations, once vibrant and personalized learning spaces became plain and

uniform, pushing teachers to adjust their teaching methods to keep students engaged without the aid of visual materials. This change underscores the need for enhanced instructional support, such as training programs that equip educators with strategies to create meaningful and engaging lessons within simplified classroom environments. Findings also highlight the importance of providing flexible teaching tools and continuous professional development tailored to minimalist setups. These implications suggest that policymakers and school leaders must prioritize teacher preparedness and ensure that learning remains effective and motivating, even within physically limited classroom conditions.

The shift to bare classrooms disrupted established routines and transformed the physical learning space, influencing the ways in which lessons were delivered, teacher-learner relationships were maintained, and a sense of community was cultivated. Classrooms that once reflected creativity and identity became neutral and minimal. This abrupt change challenged educators to adapt their methods within a simplified and less stimulating environment.

These changes posed challenges to classroom dynamics, engagement strategies, and instructional practices. Teachers needed to explore alternative approaches to maintain learner interest and motivation. The absence of visual stimuli demanded greater effort in sustaining learners' attention and participation. Despite the initial difficulties, the experience also prompted critical reflection among educators on the core elements of effective teaching.

Many came to realize that teaching effectiveness does not solely depend on visual aesthetics. Rather, it lies in the clarity of instruction, the relevance of content, and the ability to respond to learners' needs. The policy highlighted the importance of adaptability, intentional instructional design, and fostering meaningful connections with learners, regardless of the physical setup of the classroom. This shift encouraged teachers to focus more on substance over style, prioritizing learning outcomes over decorative displays. Ultimately, the experience underscored that meaningful learning can still take place in a simplified environment when pedagogy is purposeful and learner-centered.

Finally, based on the experiences of the ten participants, this study provides valuable insights that could benefit other stakeholders in the education sector. We should conduct additional research at different sites with a more diverse group of participants to further validate and compare the findings. Future researchers may explore related topics to identify variations in how Department of Education teachers have implemented and adapted to the "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Policy. These studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the policy's impact on teaching practices, classroom management, and learner-learning outcomes, leading to more effective strategies for supporting teachers and learners. Moreover, incorporating perspectives from school heads, parents, and learners may yield a more holistic view of the policy's broader implications.

## 4. Concluding Remarks

This research endeavor has cast a revealing light on the layered and often unspoken realities experienced by educators under the Department of Education's "Oplan Baklas" Bare Classroom Walls Policy. What may have seemed like a simple shift in classroom aesthetics uncovered deeper narratives of loss, adjustment, and resilience. Stripped of the usual visual aids, many teachers faced not only physical emptiness in their classrooms but also emotional and creative displacement. However, in the stillness that remained, something remarkable emerged—a renewed sense of purpose, quiet strength, and an unyielding dedication to learners that no policy could erase.

Sustained by faith in God and fortified by the steadfast presence of family and fellow educators, this journey unfolded not only as an academic pursuit but as a profoundly human experience. Each conversation with co-teachers echoed shared emotions such as confusion, frustration, and fatigue, but also revealed courage, adaptability, and a fierce devotion to teaching. These voices became more than testimonies; they became affirmations of truth often overlooked: that teachers, even when constrained, create meaning, inspire change, and nurture growth through sheer will and heart.

This research became a mirror, reflecting the often-invisible intersections of policy and practice, of system and soul. It reshaped the understanding of education not as a static set of rules but as a dynamic and living commitment to serve, uplift, and transform lives. In the quiet of demolished walls, the most profound truths emerged: teaching's definition is not decoration but connection, not materials, but mission. Ultimately, this study stands as both documentation and declaration, a call to honor the lived realities of those who teach with integrity, compassion, and courage, regardless of the circumstances. It reaffirms that even in times of reform and restriction, the spirit of education thrives wherever teachers lead with empathy, adapt with creativity, and persevere with vision. In every bare wall, there remains the potential to rebuild not just spaces but hope.

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**Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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