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Teachers' Narratives in Supporting Learners with Emotional Regulation Challenges in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' accounts of supporting learners with emotional regulation challenges in selected public schools in Clarin District, Division of Misamis Occidental. Ten purposively selected teachers participated in semi-structured interviews; data were interpreted through thematic analysis. Teachers described interruptions to instruction, emotional strain, insufficient training, and institutional constraints. They reported positive reinforcement, predictable routines, individualized support, emotional skill-building, and collaboration with parents and colleagues. Findings highlight the need for professional development, coordinated referral systems, and stronger school-based support.

Keywords: *emotional regulation; teacher narratives; classroom management; social-emotional learning; qualitative research.*

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Introduction

Emotional regulation—the ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions in ways that support learning and relationships—is closely linked with classroom engagement and behavioral adjustment. Learners experiencing difficulty with regulation may respond to stress through emotional outbursts, withdrawal, anxiety, or disrupted attention. For teachers, these situations require immediate instructional decisions alongside empathetic, developmentally appropriate support.

Within Philippine public schools, teachers often function as the first adults to identify and respond to socio-emotional concerns. Their capacity to provide support depends not only on professional skills but also on class size, family communication, access to guidance services, and school-wide procedures. The present inquiry foregrounds teachers' narratives rather than clinical classifications of learners.

The study was situated in selected public schools in Clarin District, Division of Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. It addressed the limited locally documented evidence on how classroom teachers interpret and manage learners' emotional regulation difficulties in ordinary teaching situations. Teachers' accounts offer a practical basis for examining both adaptive classroom practices and the conditions that constrain them.

Emotion Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998), social-emotional learning perspectives (CASEL, 2020), Vygotsky's sociocultural account of guided development, and co-regulation perspectives informed the study's interpretation. These frameworks collectively emphasize the interaction of learners' emerging self-regulation capacities, teachers' emotional modeling, classroom relationships, and contextual supports.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative narrative design to examine teachers' accounts of supporting learners with emotional regulation challenges in selected public elementary and secondary schools in Clarin District, Division of Misamis Occidental, during School Year 2025–2026. Ten teachers were purposively selected based on at least two years of teaching experience, direct experience addressing learners' emotional regulation difficulties, and willingness to participate; the thesis reported data saturation. Data were gathered through individual interviews using a researcher-developed, expert-validated semi-structured guide after securing the necessary permissions and informed consent. Interview narratives were coded and analyzed thematically to identify recurring experiences, classroom strategies, and challenges. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and findings were interpreted as context-specific teacher perspectives rather than clinical assessments or statistically generalizable results.

Results and Discussions

The analysis produced three complementary thematic groupings: (1) experiences of teachers supporting learners with emotional regulation challenges, (2) strategies employed in the classroom, and (3) challenges that constrain support. The tables below consolidate codes from the original thesis, followed by interpretive discussion grounded in its participant narratives.

Teachers' Experiences

Table 1. Teachers' Experiences: Codes and Themes

Theme	Illustrative codes from the thesis
1. Classroom Management Challenges	Difficulty managing disruptive behaviors and emotional outbursts; Frequent interruptions affecting lesson flow and student engagement; Time spent addressing individual emotional needs
2. Emotional Impact on Teachers	Feelings of stress, frustration, and emotional exhaustion; Experiences of burnout due to repeated behavioral concerns; Struggles in maintaining patience and emotional control
3. Limited Training and Professional Support	Lack of training on emotional and behavioral interventions; Insufficient knowledge of effective

	strategies; Need for seminars, workshops, and expert guidance
4. Instructional and Coping Strategies	Use of positive reinforcement and behavior modification strategies; Providing individualized support and accommodations; Adjusting teaching approaches to meet learners' emotional needs
5. Collaboration and Support Systems	Coordination with parents and guardians regarding student behavior; Seeking help from guidance counselors and school administrators; Peer support and sharing of best practices among teachers

Teachers described emotional regulation support as inseparable from instruction. Interruptions, emotional labor, limited preparation, instructional adaptation, and collaboration shaped the way they understood their professional role. These themes are presented as qualitative patterns rather than frequency estimates.

Classroom Management and Emotional Labor

Participants described emotional outbursts as events that can interrupt an entire lesson, even when only one learner is affected. One teacher explained:

"When a learner suddenly throws things or starts crying loudly, I have to pause everything just to calm the situation."

"Even if only one student is having difficulty controlling emotions, the whole class gets distracted and loses focus."

These accounts suggest that responding to a learner's immediate emotional need can compete with maintaining instructional continuity for peers. The challenge is relational and pedagogical: teachers must preserve the dignity of the distressed learner while restoring a productive learning environment.

The emotional impact theme captures teachers' stress, frustration, and exhaustion associated with repeated incidents. Maintaining patience and composure becomes a form of professional emotional work. The study therefore points to the importance of support for teachers themselves, not solely behavioral strategies directed toward learners.

Professional Preparation, Adaptation, and Collaboration

Teachers reported gaps in formal preparation for emotional and behavioral interventions, alongside efforts to adjust instruction and draw on practical experience. Their narratives included one-on-one conversations, modified learning tasks, positive reinforcement, and calm modeling. The collaboration theme reflects communication with families, consultation with colleagues, and requests for guidance or administrative assistance.

Taken together, the experience themes depict teachers as both instructional practitioners and informal co-regulators. This dual responsibility aligns with the study's theoretical emphasis on socially mediated emotional development, while also exposing the limits of relying on individual teacher initiative without school-level systems.

These findings are supported by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who emphasized that teachers' social and emotional competence plays a significant role in classroom management, teacher–student relationships, and the creation of supportive learning environments. Similarly, Gross (1998) explained that emotional regulation involves processes through which individuals manage their emotional responses, highlighting the importance of emotional awareness and regulation in challenging classroom situations. Hochschild (1983) further emphasized that emotional labor requires individuals to regulate their emotional expressions to meet professional expectations, which may contribute to psychological strain when emotional demands are persistent. Moreover, Pianta et al. (2008) highlighted the importance of emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional interactions in promoting positive classroom experiences, while Darling-Hammond et al. (2017)

emphasized that continuous professional development and collaborative learning strengthen teachers' instructional competencies. These perspectives reinforce the findings that teachers' experiences in supporting learners with emotional regulation difficulties involve interconnected classroom management challenges, emotional demands, instructional adaptations, and collaborative responsibilities. Overall, the findings suggest that effective emotional regulation support requires not only teachers' patience and adaptive instructional practices but also sustained professional training, family–school collaboration, and institutional support systems that promote both learner development and teacher well-being.

Classroom Strategies

Table 2. Strategies Used by Teachers: Codes and Themes

Theme	Illustrative codes from the thesis
1. Positive Reinforcement Strategies	Use of praise and rewards to reinforce positive behavior; Giving incentives for self-control and appropriate responses; Acknowledging small improvements in behavior
2. Structured Classroom Management Techniques	Establishing clear classroom rules and behavioral expectations; Implementing consistent routines and predictable schedules; Setting boundaries and consequences for misbehavior
3. Individualized and Responsive Teaching Approaches	Providing individualized instruction and differentiated tasks; Allowing breaks or "cool-down" time for students; Adjusting workload based on emotional capacity
4. Emotional Regulation Skill-Building Strategies	Teaching coping mechanisms (deep breathing, mindfulness, self-talk); Modeling appropriate emotional responses; Guiding learners in recognizing and expressing emotions
5. Collaborative Support Systems	Communicating regularly with parents/guardians about behavior; Referring students to guidance counselors or specialists; Coordinating with colleagues for intervention strategies

Five strategy themes emerged: positive reinforcement; structured classroom management; individualized and responsive teaching; emotional regulation skill-building; and collaborative support. These practices were described as adaptable responses to classroom needs rather than standardized, experimentally evaluated interventions.

Positive Reinforcement and Predictable Routines

Participants used praise, encouragement, small incentives, and acknowledgment of incremental improvement to reinforce appropriate behavior. Such strategies shifted attention toward constructive actions and provided opportunities for learners to experience success. Teachers also established rules, routines, schedules, and visual behavior reminders to make expectations clear and predictable.

Predictability may be especially useful when learners struggle with transitions or uncertainty. However, the narratives also suggest that consistency requires sustained attention and time, which can be difficult in classrooms with diverse needs.

Individualized Support and Emotional Skill-Building

Teachers described differentiated tasks, private conversations, brief breaks, and one-on-one guidance. They also modeled calm responses and taught practical coping techniques, including breathing, relaxation, self-talk, and naming emotions. As one participant explained:

"I remind them how to breathe and relax when they are starting to feel overwhelmed."

"I make sure that I stay calm so they can see how to handle emotions properly."

These accounts indicate that teachers sought to teach emotional skills rather than respond only after behavioral difficulties occurred. Modeling, supportive language, and guided reflection can be understood as everyday forms of co-regulation. The data do not, however, independently measure long-term changes in learner outcomes.

Collaborative Support

Teachers described contacting parents, consulting colleagues, seeking assistance from school personnel, and, when available, referring learners to guidance specialists. Collaboration was portrayed as necessary for consistent support across home and school. The accounts also suggest that the usefulness of collaboration depends on whether families and institutional personnel can participate regularly.

These findings are supported by Simonsen et al. (2008), who emphasized that positive reinforcement, clearly established behavioral expectations, and consistent classroom routines are evidence-based practices for promoting appropriate learner behavior and minimizing classroom disruptions. Similarly, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) highlighted that teachers' social and emotional competence contributes to supportive classroom environments, positive teacher–student relationships, and learners' emotional development. Gross (1998) further explained that emotional regulation involves processes through which individuals recognize and manage their emotional responses, providing a theoretical basis for teaching emotional awareness and coping strategies. Moreover, Tomlinson (2014) emphasized the importance of differentiated instruction in addressing learners' diverse developmental and instructional needs, while Epstein (2011) underscored the significance of school–family partnerships in strengthening learner support. These perspectives reinforce the findings that teachers employ interconnected classroom strategies involving positive reinforcement, structured routines, individualized instruction, emotional skill-building, and collaborative interventions. Overall, the findings suggest that effective emotional regulation support requires a proactive, responsive, and collaborative approach that integrates teachers' emotional competence, appropriate classroom management practices, and sustained family and institutional involvement.

Implementation Challenges

Table 3. Challenges Encountered by Teachers: Codes and Themes

Theme	Illustrative codes from the thesis
1. Classroom Management Difficulties	Frequent emotional outbursts disrupting lessons; Difficulty maintaining order and focus in class; Managing multiple learners with diverse needs simultaneously
2. Emotional and Psychological Strain on Teachers	Feelings of stress, frustration, and emotional fatigue; Experiences of burnout due to continuous behavioral demands; Difficulty maintaining patience and composure
3. Insufficient Training and Professional Preparation	Lack of training in handling emotional and behavioral issues; Limited knowledge of effective intervention strategies; Inadequate access to professional development programs
4. Weak Home-School Collaboration	Limited support from parents or guardians; Inconsistent reinforcement of behavior management at home; Communication gaps with families
5. Limited Institutional Support and Resources	Insufficient support from school administration or specialists; Lack of guidance counselors or mental health professionals; Inadequate materials or programs for behavioral support

The challenge matrix identifies classroom management demands, emotional and psychological strain, insufficient professional preparation, weak home–school collaboration, and limited institutional support and

resources. These themes reinforce the earlier findings while highlighting constraints that individual classroom strategies cannot fully resolve.

Classroom, Professional, and Institutional Constraints

Participants described frequent outbursts, multiple simultaneous needs, and insufficient time for individualized attention. These conditions complicated both instructional pacing and the provision of emotionally responsive support. They also reported stress and fatigue associated with repeated emotionally demanding interactions.

The training theme reflects uncertainty about selecting suitable interventions and a perceived lack of access to relevant professional development. This finding suggests a need for practical training that addresses recognition of emotional distress, classroom de-escalation, positive discipline, communication, and referral boundaries without asking teachers to assume clinical roles.

Weak home–school collaboration was linked to limited parental participation, communication gaps, and inconsistent reinforcement of approaches at home. Teachers viewed coordinated action as important, but acknowledged that communication was not always sustained.

Institutional barriers included limited guidance services, insufficient materials or programs, and large class sizes. One participant stated:

"We do not always have access to a counselor, so we handle the situation ourselves."

"It is difficult to give attention to each learner when the class is large."

These accounts suggest that classroom-level responses alone are unlikely to address every need. Stronger school-wide coordination, clear escalation procedures, and access to specialized services may help teachers respond appropriately while maintaining their instructional responsibilities.

Across all three matrices, the same central tension appears: teachers demonstrate resourcefulness and care, yet their capacity to provide consistent emotional regulation support is constrained by time, preparation, and institutional resources. Experiences of classroom disruption correspond with the use of predictable routines; reported emotional labor corresponds with efforts to model calmness; and gaps in professional support correspond with reliance on colleagues and parents.

The findings are consistent with the study's social-emotional learning and co-regulation framing: emotional development is shaped through repeated, supportive interactions, not simply through rules or sanctions. The qualitative evidence supports the relevance of teacher–learner relationships and structured classroom practices, but it does not establish that any particular strategy caused improvement in emotional regulation.

These findings are supported by Jennings and Greenberg (2009), who emphasized that teachers' social and emotional competence is essential in managing classroom behavior, fostering positive teacher–learner relationships, and maintaining supportive learning environments. Similarly, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) highlighted that demanding classroom conditions, excessive workloads, and insufficient organizational support contribute to teacher stress and emotional exhaustion. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) further emphasized that sustained professional development, practical training, and collaborative learning opportunities are important in strengthening teachers' instructional competencies and responsiveness to diverse learner needs. Moreover, Epstein (2011) underscored the significance of school–family partnerships in promoting consistent learner support, while Bakker and Demerouti (2007) explained that insufficient organizational resources, combined with high professional demands, increase the risk of occupational strain. These perspectives reinforce the findings that teachers encounter interconnected classroom management, emotional, professional, familial, and institutional challenges when supporting learners with emotional regulation difficulties. Overall, the findings suggest that effective implementation requires comprehensive school-wide support, continuous professional development, stronger home–school collaboration, and accessible specialized services to promote both learners' emotional development and teachers' professional well-being.

Conclusions

Teachers in selected Clarin District public schools experienced emotional regulation support as a complex responsibility involving instructional management, emotional labor, adaptive teaching, and coordination with families and colleagues. The ten participants described using reinforcement, structured routines, individualized assistance, emotional skill-building, and collaborative support. At the same time, limited training, high classroom demands, weak home–school coordination, and inadequate access to specialist services constrained their efforts. The study underscores that teachers' personal commitment is valuable but insufficient as a substitute for organized school-based systems. Support for learners with emotional regulation difficulties should therefore include teacher capacity-building, coordinated assistance, and clearer mechanisms for accessing appropriate guidance services. Because the findings arise from a small purposive qualitative sample, they should be interpreted as context-specific insights rather than generalized estimates.

Recommendations

School administrators should establish coherent procedures for consultation, documentation, referral, and teacher support. Teachers should be offered relevant professional learning and peer-sharing opportunities focused on emotional regulation and positive classroom practices. Guidance personnel and other qualified specialists should support case planning and follow-up where available. Parents and guardians should be engaged through respectful, sustained communication, while learners should have structured opportunities to practice self-awareness, emotional expression, and coping skills. Future researchers may include learner and family perspectives or evaluate specific interventions using designs appropriate for measuring outcomes.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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