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TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN INTEGRATING RECREATIONAL STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of English teachers in integrating recreational strategies in selected secondary schools of Jimenez District, Misamis Occidental, during the School Year 2025–2026. Through thematic analysis of interview data, the findings revealed that teachers employ a diverse repertoire of strategies, including gamified competitions, movement-based activities, role-play, and culturally contextualized indigenous games, to foster an engaging learning environment. However, their implementation is significantly challenged by time constraints, curriculum pressure, classroom management difficulties, and limited resources, leading teachers to develop adaptive coping mechanisms like flexible improvisation, proactive planning, and professional collaboration. Despite these hurdles, the study concludes that the successful integration of these strategies yields substantial pedagogical benefits, enhanced student motivation, improved social and communication skills, and stronger learning outcomes. Thus, the study recommends structured professional development, administrative support for resourcefulness, and further research to quantify the impact of these strategies.

Keywords: coping mechanisms, English teachers, lived experiences, pedagogical implications, phenomenological study, recreational strategies

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Introduction

Recreational strategies refer to instructional methods that integrate play, creativity, movement, and enjoyable activities to enhance learning, sustain student interest, and promote active participation. These strategies include storytelling, dramatization, role-playing, language games, music-movement activities, and other interactive tasks that strengthen comprehension and performance, as applied by classroom teachers to make lessons more engaging (Green & Sun, 2025). In the Philippine context, recreational approaches also support teacher well-being. Nisnisan and Adlawan (2022) reported that high school teachers in Misamis Occidental increasingly view leisure-infused lessons as beneficial not only for students but also for reducing teacher stress and improving work–life balance. This highlights a shifting perception: recreational strategies are now recognized as essential pedagogical tools rather than optional enhancements.

Integrating recreational strategy is not simply a means for involvement; it is a layered, sophisticated pedagogy for the cultivation of requisite lifeworld and self-regulated learning, which would then be culturally responsive. Ahmad et al. (2024) mentioned in a phenomenological study on life skills integration that interactive and adaptive teaching methods serve as conduits or avenues for collaboration and problem-solving. This is also true for the intentional use of culturally contextualized strategies, such as traditional Filipino games, which directly align with the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy espoused by Anyichie et al. (2023) and are key to keeping diverse students engaged while relating instruction to their lived experiences. For learners who were less receptive, teachers reported that they attempted purposeful actions, such as using simplified mechanics, providing one-on-one facilitation, or linking them with a supportive peer. Such an approach denotes flexibility and student-centeredness that is encouraged in several foundational guides on practical pedagogy (Boettcher & Conrad, 2021). Most of the pedagogical styles used were facilitative and adaptive, with an evolution from direct instruction to designing experiential learning environments—the trend that puts students in charge of their learning process.

The English teachers act as the most central pedagogical agents in the important transition from the traditional instructional model to the engagement-oriented approach of this new century. They take up multiple roles: facilitators, designers of the curriculum in question, and classroom ethnographers assessing the readiness of their students culturally and able to mediate their learning effectively. Substantial improvisational teaching would occur here, a skill mentioned by Colisao, Dela Cruz, & Santos (2025) in connection with non-specialist teachers but becomes important for adapting a pre-planned recreational activity to shifting classroom realities. The conscious decision to apply a recreational activity is thus the act of professional agency on the part of the teacher to merge the prescribed competencies for learning with unorthodox measures that lower the affective filter and make concepts of abstract language real, as shown in Gelizon's (2024) study on fun English classes. Their lived experiences of intentions, adaptations, and reflections serve as the essential lens for comprehending both the successes and challenges of integrating recreational activities.

Narváez-Carrión (2025) emphasized that teachers' application of recreational strategies transforms the classroom by making learning more engaging and motivating. Likewise, Samortin (2023) demonstrated that gamified learning significantly boosts vocabulary retention, underscoring the growing relevance of recreational approaches in language instruction. Although recreational strategies are often associated with MAPEH, recent research highlights their increasing use in English language teaching. Otravenko et al. (2021) found that leisure-based activities improve academic achievement, creativity, and overall student well-being. Protacio (2023) showed that role play and learning games foster social interaction and meaningful communication. Capinding et al. (2023) found that traditional Filipino games strengthen early literacy, while Gelizon (2024) reported that story-based gamified techniques enhance writing proficiency and confidence. Other local studies noted the value of playful methods in addressing reading difficulties (Rominimbang et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings emphasize that recreational strategies contribute to student-centered, responsive, and highly engaging classroom instruction.

The Jimenez District of Misamis Occidental—comprising five public secondary schools serving both coastal and upland learners—continues to face persistent challenges related to limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and post-pandemic learning gaps (Macasinag & Camacho, 2023). The classroom is a temporary ecosystem where teachers' power and fun activities come together, but this is heavily influenced by material, time, and social and cultural factors. This environment is not a neutral container but an active variable that shapes the feasibility and form of pedagogical play.

As Macasinag & Camacho (2023) highlight, pervasive instructional resource gaps in Philippine schools directly constrain the types and quality of activities a teacher can implement. Within this space, teachers must negotiate large class sizes, fixed schedules, and diverse learner needs, all while operating within broader policy frameworks that may encourage co-curricular engagement, such as DepEd Order No. 66, s. 2017, but provide limited practical guidance for daily implementation. The physical and logistical realities of the classroom require constant adaptation, transforming theoretical models of play into spontaneous pedagogical improvisations. Therefore, understanding integration requires examining how recreational strategies are enacted within this specific, often resource-constrained ecosystem, where ideal methods are invariably reshaped by immediate contextual realities.

Despite growing evidence of the benefits of recreational strategies for learners, a significant and nuanced research gap persists concerning the lived experiences of the English teachers who implement them. Existing literature, such as the work of Chen and Liang (2022) on gamification and Lynch et al. (2022) on movement breaks, primarily focuses on measurable student outcomes—engagement, skill acquisition, or behavioral changes. Meanwhile, policy frameworks like DepEd Order No. 66, s. 2017 encourage participatory activities, and resource studies like Green and Sun's (2024) offer valuable tools, but they operate at a macro level, offering little insight into the micro-level personal and professional journey of the teacher. The challenges of adaptation noted by Mendoza and Reyes (2023) and the resource gaps documented by Macasinag and Camacho (2023) point to a complex implementation landscape, yet the subjective, first-person experience of navigating this landscape—the successes, frustrations, improvisations, and embodied knowledge developed by teachers—remains largely unexplored. This study directly addresses this gap by shifting the analytical focus from the effect of strategies on students to the experience of teachers implementing them.

In response to this gap, this study explores the lived experiences of English teachers integrating recreational strategies in the secondary classroom. It describes the types of recreational strategies they employ, the challenges they encounter, the adjustments they make, and the insights they derive from these experiences. By centering teacher voices, this study intends to contribute to a context-responsive, engaging, and sustainable pedagogy grounded in authentic teacher realities.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design grounded in the framework of Moustakas (1994) to explore the lived experiences of English teachers in integrating recreational strategies into language instruction. Conducted in selected public secondary schools within Jimenez District, Division of Misamis Occidental, the study involved fifteen purposively selected English teachers who actively utilized recreational pedagogies such as games, movement-based activities, arts integration, role play, and digital play in their classes. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, supported by lesson plans and instructional materials, and analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological method, including epoche, horizontalization, imaginative variation, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, were strictly observed throughout the research process. The study ultimately sought to uncover the essence of teachers' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and reflections in implementing recreational approaches within the context of public secondary English education.

Results and Discussions

Recreational Strategies Employed by English Teachers in the Classroom

The findings revealed that English teachers employ a wide range of recreational strategies to create engaging and student-centered learning environments. Among the most frequently used approaches were gamified and competitive learning activities such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Jeopardy-style games, word puzzles, and reward-based group competitions. Teachers explained that these activities increased learner participation, sustained classroom attention, and encouraged active involvement in English lessons. Participants also integrated movement-based and kinesthetic activities including gallery walks, relays, Four Corners, scavenger hunts, and physical energizers to make learning more dynamic and interactive. In addition, role-play, storytelling, dramatization, and culturally contextualized games such as Patintero, Tumbang Preso, and Pinoy Henyo were used to strengthen

communication skills while connecting lessons to students' cultural experiences. These findings indicate that recreational pedagogies are intentionally designed to promote meaningful engagement and authentic language use. Similar findings were reported by Chen and Liang (2022), who emphasized that gamified instruction enhances learner motivation and participation through interactive and competitive experiences.

The study further showed that teachers incorporated creative and media-integrated strategies such as infographics, meme-based summaries, digital presentations, and collaborative projects to strengthen students' creativity and communication skills. Reading-centered recreational strategies were also evident through guided reading sessions, storytelling circles, spelling bees, trivia games, and interactive reading discussions. Teachers perceived these activities as effective in reducing learners' anxiety while improving comprehension and vocabulary retention. Participants emphasized that students became more enthusiastic and participative when lessons were presented through enjoyable and collaborative activities. These findings support the assertion of Wilson et al. (2022) that interactive literacy practices and creative learning environments contribute significantly to student engagement and classroom connectedness. Overall, the findings demonstrate that recreational strategies are not merely supplementary activities but pedagogical tools that facilitate holistic learning, collaboration, and experiential language development.

Challenges Encountered by English Teachers in Implementing Recreational Strategies

Despite the positive outcomes associated with recreational pedagogies, the findings revealed that English teachers encountered several challenges in implementing these strategies effectively. One of the most prominent issues identified was time constraints and curriculum pressure. Teachers explained that the limited duration of class periods and the need to complete MELCs and MATATAG curriculum competencies often restricted the use of recreational activities. Participants shared that many activities required extensive preparation and implementation time, making it difficult to balance engagement with curriculum coverage. Large class sizes and classroom management concerns also emerged as major challenges, particularly during highly interactive and movement-based activities. Teachers reported difficulties in controlling student excitement, maintaining discipline, and ensuring that all learners remained focused on the intended objectives. These findings indicate that while recreational strategies enhance engagement, they also demand careful facilitation and classroom organization. Similar observations were made by Pate et al. (2023), who argued that curriculum demands and classroom management issues remain major barriers to the integration of active learning strategies.

Another significant challenge identified was the lack of instructional resources and technological infrastructure. Teachers experienced difficulties due to insufficient materials, unstable internet connections, limited access to devices, and inadequate classroom resources. Several participants disclosed that they often used personal funds to support classroom activities and instructional materials. Furthermore, some teachers observed that learners occasionally focused more on competition and enjoyment than on the actual learning objectives, while others became passive during group tasks. Instructional design and implementation difficulties also emerged, particularly in differentiating activities according to students' readiness levels and explaining game mechanics clearly. These findings suggest that the successful implementation of recreational strategies requires not only creativity but also adequate resources, instructional planning, and contextual adaptation. The findings are consistent with Lyles (2024), who emphasized that limited resources and technological challenges significantly affect the sustainability of innovative pedagogical practices in public school settings.

Coping Mechanisms Used by English Teachers in Implementing Recreational Strategies

The findings revealed that teachers employed several adaptive coping mechanisms to address the challenges encountered in implementing recreational strategies. One of the most prominent coping practices was flexibility and adaptive teaching. Teachers modified activities, simplified game mechanics, shifted to alternative strategies, and adjusted instructional approaches depending on learners' responses and classroom situations. Participants emphasized the importance of being responsive to students' needs and maintaining learner engagement even when activities did not proceed as planned. One participant explained that when learners failed to understand the activity, adjustments and simplifications were immediately implemented to sustain participation and comprehension. These findings demonstrate that flexibility is considered an essential professional competency in managing recreational pedagogies. Similar findings were identified by Pebriantini and Vianty (2024), who

emphasized that adaptive teaching practices enable educators to respond effectively to diverse classroom dynamics and learner needs.

The study also highlighted the significance of proactive lesson planning, classroom management strategies, resourcefulness, and professional collaboration. Teachers prepared backup offline activities, reflected on lesson outcomes, established clear classroom rules, and assigned structured group roles to maintain order during interactive activities. Many participants also utilized improvised materials and converted digital games into manual or paper-based versions when technology was unavailable. In addition, teachers sought support from colleagues, mentors, Learning Action Cells (LACs), webinars, and online resources to improve their instructional practices. These coping strategies demonstrate teachers' resilience, creativity, and commitment to sustaining engaging learning environments despite institutional limitations. The findings support the study of Gregersen et al. (2023), which highlighted that collaborative support systems and adaptive resourcefulness contribute significantly to teacher efficacy and professional resilience in challenging educational contexts.

Pedagogical Implications of Integrating Recreational Strategies in the Classroom

The findings revealed several pedagogical implications associated with the integration of recreational strategies in English instruction. Teachers observed increased learner engagement, motivation, participation, and attentiveness during classroom activities. Recreational approaches encouraged students to become more actively involved in learning tasks, reducing passivity and enhancing classroom interaction. Participants emphasized that learners demonstrated greater confidence and willingness to communicate when lessons incorporated games, movement activities, role-play, and collaborative tasks. Teachers also noted improvements in teamwork, communication skills, and classroom relationships as students worked together in supportive and low-anxiety environments. These findings suggest that recreational strategies contribute not only to academic learning but also to the social and emotional development of learners. This supports the findings of Mendoza and Reyes (2023), who emphasized that experiential and collaborative activities foster positive classroom climates and improve learners' confidence and communication skills.

Moreover, the findings demonstrated that recreational strategies improved comprehension, retention, and overall academic performance. Teachers observed that learners better understood abstract concepts and produced higher-quality outputs when lessons were delivered through experiential and interactive activities. The findings also indicated a clear shift from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered and experiential learning approaches, where teachers acted as facilitators rather than sole providers of knowledge. Participants emphasized the importance of flexibility, contextual adaptation, and culturally relevant teaching in implementing effective recreational pedagogies. These findings imply that recreational strategies support holistic and meaningful learning experiences by integrating enjoyment, collaboration, creativity, and contextual relevance into classroom instruction. Consistent with the work of Ozturk et al. (2024), experiential and learner-centered pedagogies promote deeper understanding, sustained engagement, and long-term knowledge retention among students.

Conclusions

This study concludes that the integration of recreational strategies by English teachers, while challenged by systemic constraints such as time limitations and resource scarcity, is a transformative pedagogical practice. The most highlighted findings revealed that teachers employed a diverse range of strategies—including gamified, movement-based, and culturally contextualized activities—and develop essential adaptive competencies, such as real-time flexibility and resourcefulness, to implement them. Ultimately, this practice successfully fosters a learner-centered environment, leading to enhanced student engagement, holistic skill development, and more profound learning outcomes, affirming its value for holistic education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that English teachers continuously enhance their use of recreational strategies by aligning playful and experiential activities with MELCs and MATATAG competencies while documenting effective classroom practices for sharing during Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and professional collaborations. School administrators are encouraged to provide institutional support through dedicated collaborative planning time, peer mentoring opportunities, recognition

of innovative teaching practices, and allocation of resources for low-cost and improvised instructional materials. Likewise, the Department of Education may strengthen policy and training support by developing contextualized repositories of recreational learning resources and integrating practical modules on game-based, experiential, and learner-centered instruction into INSET programs. Teacher Education Institutions should further reinforce pre-service teacher preparation by incorporating courses on playful pedagogy, classroom management in active learning environments, and instructional game design to better equip future educators for innovative teaching practices. Finally, future researchers may conduct longitudinal or mixed-method studies examining the direct effects of recreational strategies on student achievement, engagement, and language proficiency, as well as explore their applicability across other subject areas and educational contexts.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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