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Building Positive Digital Classrooms: Strategies For Enhancing Student Conduct And Collaboration In Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid transition to digital education, accelerated by technological advancements and pandemic-related disruptions, has reshaped teaching and learning in basic education. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the practical and context-specific strategies utilized by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, during the 2025–2026 school year to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments. Findings revealed that establishing clear rules and expectations, consistently applying positive reinforcement, and balancing discipline with support were fundamental to promoting positive student behavior. Engagement strategies, including interactive activities, collaborative tasks, and gamified learning, further enhanced participation and respectful interaction. Teacher reflection, adaptability, and intentional planning emerged as critical factors in maintaining order, fostering collaboration, and shaping a constructive online learning environment. Additionally, teachers' experiences highlighted the importance of modeling respectful behavior, structured guidelines, facilitation of online engagement, and integration of experiential and moral learning. These approaches promoted equitable participation, responsible communication, active cooperation, and peer support, enabling students to engage confidently despite challenges such as limited access to devices, unstable internet, and digital distractions.

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The study also identified five core strategies for building positive digital classrooms: setting clear expectations, modeling respect, using reinforcement, assuming the role of facilitator, and promoting inclusion and ethical values. The use of digital tools and structured pedagogical methods provided the necessary scaffolding for collaboration, ethical behavior, and confident participation. Overall, the findings suggest that effective digital classroom management requires a holistic approach combining pedagogical guidance, moral modeling, and strategic technology integration. Thoughtful application of digital tools can foster academic growth, social-emotional development, and ethical conduct, while addressing equity and access remains critical to maximizing these benefits.

Keywords: *online pedagogy, digital engagement, classroom ethics, collaborative learning*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The global shift to digital education in the wake of technological advancements and pandemic-induced disruptions has radically transformed the way teaching and learning occur, particularly in the basic education sector. Classrooms have evolved into hybrid or fully online learning environments, pushing educators to adopt new strategies that promote not only academic achievement but also proper student conduct and collaborative engagement.

As learners become more immersed in digital platforms, the classroom dynamic in some schools in US is no longer confined to physical spaces but is extended to virtual interactions, raising the need for classroom management approaches that address digital behavior and social interaction (Trust & Whalen, 2020). The rise of virtual schooling has offered opportunities for flexibility and innovation, yet it has also exposed gaps in how teachers manage student behavior, engagement, and cooperation in the absence of face-to-face supervision.

In the Philippine setting, the abrupt implementation of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted significant concerns regarding students' behavior, discipline, and collaboration online.

According to Almario et al. (2021), Filipino teachers encountered widespread issues with student disengagement, digital distractions, inappropriate online conduct, and difficulties in fostering meaningful collaboration during remote classes. These challenges were intensified by disparities in digital access and technological fluency, both for students and teachers. Many educators lacked adequate training in managing digital classrooms, leading to inconsistent or ineffective behavior management strategies. Additionally, the lack of strong policies or standards on digital citizenship in many schools contributed to the persistence of problematic behaviors that hindered collaboration and participation.

In South Central Mindanao, the struggle to build and maintain positive digital classrooms is further intensified by contextual realities such as limited ICT infrastructure, lack of reliable internet, and under-resourced public schools (Tanggol & Navarro, 2022). Teachers in the region report challenges in maintaining classroom order and encouraging student cooperation in digital platforms, especially when dealing with learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged

backgrounds. The cultural and linguistic diversity of the region also presents additional complexities in ensuring inclusive and collaborative online learning environments.

While there are national efforts to improve ICT integration and professional development, there remains a notable lack of localized research that examines how teachers in Mindanao, particularly in Sultan Kudarat, manage digital classrooms and what strategies they find effective in promoting student conduct and collaboration.

This literature gap must be addressed to inform policies and practices that are culturally and contextually relevant. Addressing these issues directly supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4—Quality Education, particularly Target 4.7, which emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors needed for sustainable and inclusive learning. Promoting positive behavior and collaboration in digital classrooms not only enhances academic outcomes but also strengthens the social and emotional competencies of learners, essential in 21st-century education.

The goal of this study is to explore and identify practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments. By documenting these approaches, the study seeks to contribute actionable insights to educational stakeholders and support the development of professional training programs, school policies, and classroom practices that foster positive digital learning spaces across marginalized communities in the Philippines.

Research Questions

This study aimed to explore and identify the practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat for school year 2025-2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments. Specifically, this delved with the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of teachers in promoting positive student conduct within digital classroom environments?
2. How do these experiences contribute to collaboration and peer interaction in digital learning spaces?
3. What personal meanings do teachers and students assign to the strategies used in fostering a positive and collaborative digital classroom culture?
4. How do digital tools and platforms influence the experiences and perceptions of respectful conduct and teamwork in online or hybrid classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and identify practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2025–2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments. A qualitative design is appropriate because it allows researchers to capture participants' subjective experiences, perspectives, and practices within their natural teaching contexts, providing a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics in the digital era (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenology is particularly suited to this study as it seeks to uncover the essence of teachers' lived experiences, focusing on how they perceive and respond to challenges in managing student conduct and promoting collaboration in online classrooms (Moustakas, 1994). This approach emphasizes reflection and interpretation, enabling the researcher to identify patterns and themes that may not be visible through quantitative measures (Van Manen, 2016).

Participants of the Study

Table 1 displays the qualifications of the participants based on the criteria set by the researcher prior to the selection of qualified informants of the study.

Table 1

Participants' Inclusion Criteria

Qualifications
Participants: 15 Teachers
Active Teaching Status Participants must be full-time elementary school teachers assigned in North District, City Schools Division of Tacurong City during the school year 2025–2026 to ensure relevance to the study locale.
Experience in Digital Classroom Management Teachers must have at least two years of experience in integrating digital platforms (e.g., Google Classroom, MS Teams, Zoom, or DepEd Learning Management Systems) for instruction and classroom management.

Direct Involvement in Student Discipline and Collaboration

Participants must be regularly engaged in handling student conduct and facilitating collaborative learning activities in digital or blended classroom settings.

Willingness and Consent to Participate

Teachers must voluntarily agree to participate in the study, including interviews or focus group discussions, and be willing to share their experiences and strategies.

The participants was composed of 15 carefully selected teachers from North District, schools Division of Tacurong City for the school year 2025–2026. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who meet specific inclusion criteria set by the researcher, ensuring that they have direct experience with parental cultural differences and engagement challenges (Patton, 2015).

Sampling Technique

During the conduct of this study, a Purposive Sampling Technique was intentionally utilized to carefully select fifteen 15 elementary school teachers from North District, City Schools Division of Tacurong City, for school year 2025-2026, who meet the specific inclusion criteria established by the researcher.

Purposive sampling, alternately referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, constitutes a variant of non-probability sampling. Within this approach, researchers exercise their own judgment and discretionary acumen in the selection of individuals from the population to partake in their survey endeavors (Alchemer, 2021). This method of sampling mandates that researchers possess prior knowledge of the objectives underpinning their study so as to effectively pinpoint and make contact with eligible participants through online survey platforms like Alchemer. Researchers resort to purposive sampling in order to secure access to a distinct subgroup of individuals, whereby all survey respondents are meticulously chosen based on their alignment with a specific demographic or criterion.

Research Instruments

In this study, a semi-structured interview functioned as an exploratory instrument during both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to explore and describe the practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat for school year 2025-2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments.

The validity and appropriateness of this tool was substantiated through a rigorous evaluation process conducted by a panel of experts who possess expertise in the development of relevant research instruments.

Data Gathering Procedure

To ensure the research's reliability, the researcher maintained strict adherence to a predefined set of procedures. The primary objective of this study was to explore and describe the practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2025–2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments.

In the initial phase, the researcher diligently sought formal authorization from both the Superintendent of DepEd–City Schools Division of Tacurong and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies (CGS). This authorization was essential to obtain the necessary permissions to conduct the study, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations.

Following this, a secondary authorization letter was sent to the District Supervisor, explicitly requesting access to the specific data required for the research. Meticulously crafted interview and FGD protocols were developed, subjected to rigorous evaluation, and then administered to the targeted participants.

The researcher employed a purposive sampling technique to carefully select school heads as participants in the study. Assuming strict adherence to the established EWMCI–Research Ethics Committee, the researcher conducted interviews and facilitated Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), all of which were carried out through face-to-face interactions.

Ultimately, the data collected from interviews and FGDs were systematically organized, subjected to comprehensive analysis, and interpreted using the thematic analysis approach. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation.

Data Analysis

In this study, which focused on uncovering the practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2025–2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments, a content or thematic analysis approach was employed to examine the collected data. This methodology, as described by Flick (2014), Ngag (2023), and Braun (2009), involved the systematic categorization of textual components, including statements, phrases, and words, into organized groupings or categories. These categories were either derived from established frameworks or custom-developed to align with the study's specific objectives.

To execute this analytical process, a series of essential steps were diligently followed:

Initially, all data sources, such as interview transcripts, notes from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and relevant documents, were meticulously organized and prepared for analysis. This phase ensured the systematic arrangement and accessibility of the data.

Subsequently, the researcher deeply engaged with the data by conducting a thorough review of interview transcripts and FGD notes. This immersive process aided in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the content and context embedded within the collected information.

The researcher interpreted the meaning and implications of each theme within the context of the study's objectives, seeking patterns, connections, and variations to provide a comprehensive understanding of teachers' experiences and strategies.

This meticulous and structured process of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically explore and comprehend the practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2025–2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on exploring strategies for enhancing student conduct and collaboration in digital classrooms. It will specifically examine the lived experiences and practices of teachers who manage digital or technology-assisted classrooms in selected schools within the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat during the school year 2025–2026. Using a qualitative research design, particularly a phenomenological approach, the study will gather in-depth narratives through interviews to understand how teachers foster positive digital learning environments, address behavioral challenges, and promote collaborative engagement among students.

The participants will consist of purposively selected teachers with at least two years of experience in integrating digital platforms into their teaching. The scope of the study is limited to classroom-level strategies within the said district, and does not cover comparative analyses with other districts or quantitative measurements of student performance. The study is conducted to provide insights that may guide teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in strengthening digital classroom management practices in response to the evolving demands of 21st-century education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The global shift to digital education in the wake of technological advancements and pandemic-induced disruptions has radically transformed the way teaching and learning occur, particularly in the basic education sector. This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and identify practical and context-specific strategies used by teachers in the North District of Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, for the school year 2025–2026 to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments.

Based on the result, teachers reported that promoting positive student conduct in digital classrooms is most effective when clear rules and expectations are established, positive reinforcement is consistently applied, and discipline is balanced with support. Engagement strategies such as interactive activities, collaborative tasks, and gamified learning enhance participation and respectful behavior. Furthermore, teachers' reflection and adaptability—demonstrated through patience, flexibility, and intentional planning—play a critical role in maintaining order, fostering collaboration, and shaping a positive online learning environment.

Also, the study revealed that teachers' experiences in digital learning spaces significantly enhance collaboration and peer interaction. Key factors include modeling respectful behavior, establishing clear rules and structured guidelines, facilitating and monitoring online engagement, promoting trust and peer support, and integrating experiential and moral learning. These practices foster responsible communication, equitable participation, active cooperation, and a supportive learning environment, enabling students to engage confidently and work effectively in online and hybrid classrooms despite challenges like technical limitations or distractions.

Further, it is revealed that fostering a positive and collaborative digital classroom culture relies on five key strategies: establishing clear expectations and structured guidelines, modeling respect and positive behavior, using positive reinforcement and recognition, positioning the teacher as a facilitator and guide, and promoting inclusion, cooperation, and ethical values. These strategies collectively enhanced student engagement, responsibility, cooperation, and respectful interaction in online and hybrid learning environments. Digital tools and structured pedagogical approaches provided the scaffolding necessary for students to collaborate effectively, internalize ethical behavior, and participate confidently in both academic and social tasks.

Finally, the study found that digital tools and platforms significantly enhance collaboration, respectful conduct, and student engagement in online and hybrid classrooms. These tools promote structured teamwork, active participation, accountability, and equitable contribution, while also reshaping teacher and learner roles toward more facilitative, student-centered dynamics. However, challenges such as limited access to devices, unreliable internet, and potential distractions remain, highlighting the importance of guidance and clear digital norms to ensure productive and respectful interactions.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made in light of this study's findings:

Managing student behavior in digital classrooms extends beyond enforcing rules; it requires a holistic approach that combines guidance, encouragement, structured engagement, and teacher adaptability. Effective online classroom management fosters not only discipline but also meaningful collaboration, promoting a respectful and inclusive learning community where both students and educators grow.

Also, teachers play a central role in shaping the dynamics of digital learning by guiding students not only academically but also socially and ethically. Their intentional actions in modeling respect, structuring activities, and fostering collaboration cultivate both competence and character, highlighting that effective online learning depends as much on pedagogical and moral guidance as on technology itself.

Moreover, effective digital classroom management extends beyond technology; it requires intentional guidance, role modeling, and scaffolding by teachers to nurture ethical, inclusive, and cooperative learning communities.

Finally, it has been concluded that Integrating digital tools in teaching fosters both academic and social-emotional growth, emphasizing the need for educators to actively guide, scaffold, and model respectful behavior. Thoughtful implementation of technology can transform

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learning environments, promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and ethical conduct, while addressing equity and access issues remains essential for maximizing these benefits.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the following were recommended:

1. DepEd may develop and implement a “Digital Equity Program” that ensures all learners have access to devices and stable internet, reducing participation gaps and enabling fair opportunities for collaboration and respectful engagement online.

2. School Administrators may introduce a “Structured Digital Classroom Initiative” that provides teachers with templates for clear rules, routines, rubrics, and monitoring systems to consistently guide respectful behavior and organized teamwork in virtual and hybrid classrooms.

3. Curriculum Planners may design a “Gamified and Interactive Learning Module” that integrates collaborative activities, experiential tasks, and ethical lessons to enhance student engagement, cooperation, and positive conduct in online and blended learning environments.

4. Teachers may adopt a “Model-Reflect-Guide Approach”, where teachers actively model respectful behavior, provide positive reinforcement, and guide students’ digital interactions, fostering responsibility, ethical communication, and confident participation.

5. Future Researchers may launch a “Digital Classroom Effectiveness Study” program to explore strategies for overcoming technical limitations, distractions, and inequities, and to investigate which digital engagement practices most effectively promote collaboration, respect, and student-centered learning.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

In preparation for this study, all plans and procedures were presented to East-West Mindanao Colleges Inc. to ensure compliance with prescribed protocols. Within the context of examining teachers’ experiences and responses to parental cultural differences that limited participation, the study adhered to the following ethical principles:

Informed Consent: Explicit and informed consent was obtained from all school heads involved. Participants were provided with a clear understanding of the study’s objectives, methodology, potential risks, and benefits. Participation remained entirely voluntary, allowing withdrawal at any stage without consequences.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Participants’ identities and responses were safeguarded through pseudonyms or codes, and data were securely stored with access restricted to the research team.

Avoiding Harm: Sensitive topics, such as professional challenges, were addressed carefully to minimize emotional or psychological impact, with support systems available if needed.

Researcher–Participant Relationship: The researcher maintained professional and respectful interactions, avoiding any actions that could exploit or harm participants.

Data Protection: Data protection laws and regulations were strictly followed to safeguard participants’ personal information.

Voluntary Participation: Participants’ involvement was entirely voluntary, free from coercion or pressure.

Researcher Bias: The researcher remained vigilant of potential biases during data collection and analysis, ensuring objectivity and transparency.

Institutional Approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant institutional review boards and ethics committees before commencing the study.

Honesty and Integrity: Findings were reported truthfully and accurately, without manipulation or distortion.

Beneficence: The study aimed to positively contribute to educational practices and policies.

Cultural Sensitivity: Local customs, beliefs, and practices were respected, with no imposition of external values.

Inclusion and Diversity: The study prioritized inclusivity, capturing a wide range of strategies teachers used to enhance student conduct and peer collaboration in digital learning environments.

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Declaration AI Tools Utilization

I do hereby declare the use AI tools, such as Chat GPT and Grammarly for grammar checking and sentence organization purposes only.

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