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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROGRESSIVE RESEARCH IN ENGINEERING MANAGEMENT AND SCIENCE (IJPREMS)
(Int Peer Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 05, Issue 03, March 2025, pp : 443-453

e-ISSN : 2583-1062
Impact Factor : 7.001

GULAYAN SA PAARALAN PROGRAM OF SULOP DISTRICT: LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHER COORDINATORS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study followed phenomenological style utilizing ten (10) GPP coordinators in Sulop District, Davao del Sur as the participants in the inclusion criteria. Data gathering was conducted through key informant interviews (KII). Ethical standards were given emphasis in this work. This applied Colaizzi's seven step method in thematic analysis. The results revealed four (4) themes for the lived experiences of GPP coordinators in sustaining vegetable production of school gardens, namely: poor parental support, lack of teachers' commitment, and stress due to work demands as the negative impact. Giving happiness and relaxation was expressed as the positive one. For the coping means to address the struggles in the Gulayan sa Paaralan Program (GPP), three (3) themes prevailed. These were awareness of the importance of GPP, seminar on alternative gardening, and unity, and collaboration among stakeholders. Lastly, for the educational insights three (3) themes came out and these were, inculcating the importance of physical activities to the students' minds such as grass cutting, soil tilling and caring for plants to avoid so much exposure to gadgets. Through GPP, students were constantly reminded of maintaining cleanliness, using garden tools properly, identifying different kinds of plants, and appreciating the importance of plants and these needed to be practiced at home as well. Planning, implementing, monitoring evaluating, and harvesting through GPP implementation would maximize the participation and foster collaboration among leamers, parents, and the community; hence they too must be given attention for promulgation.

Keywords: Gulayan sa Paaralan Program, lived experiences, Teacher coordinators

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP), a school-based initiative aiming to promote sustainable vegetable production in school gardens, has long been considered an effective strategy for enhancing students' understanding of agriculture, environmental stewardship, and health. Implemented in various educational settings across the Philippines, the program is designed to integrate gardening activities into the school curriculum, encouraging both students and the broader community to engage in the cultivation of healthy food. This study seeks to explore the lived experiences of GPP coordinators, specifically in Sulop District, Davao del Sur, with the goal of understanding the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they adopt, and the educational insights they derive from their involvement in the program.

Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative research gathered data through key informant interviews with ten GPP coordinators in the district, selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Colaizzi's seven-step method was employed in the thematic analysis to ensure a rigorous exploration of the coordinators' experiences and perceptions. Ethical standards were strictly observed to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of the participants throughout the study.

The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay of both positive and negative themes concerning the coordinators' efforts in sustaining vegetable production in school gardens. Negative impacts highlighted by the participants include poor parental support, a lack of teacher commitment, and the stress associated with high work demands. On the other hand, the coordinators also expressed positive outcomes, such as the happiness and relaxation that the program provides for students and stakeholders alike. These dual aspects of the experience underscore the multifaceted nature of coordinating GPP activities.

In addressing the challenges faced, the coordinators identified key coping strategies that contributed to the success of the program. These strategies include raising awareness about the importance of GPP, organizing seminars on alternative gardening methods, and fostering unity and collaboration among various stakeholders. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the educational insights gained from the program, such as the importance of physical activities in students' development and the value of maintaining cleanliness, using garden tools properly, and cultivating an appreciation for plants.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for continuous support and collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community to maximize the potential benefits of the GPP. The findings advocate for a more systematic approach to planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the program, with the goal of fostering greater participation and creating a more sustainable, community-driven initiative.

The *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP) in Sulop District, Davao del Sur, while a commendable initiative aimed at promoting sustainable vegetable production and enhancing students' understanding of agriculture, is not without its challenges. These challenges are not only localized but also resonate globally, affecting similar school-based agricultural education programs. Among the most pressing global issues impacting the success and sustainability of the GPP are climate change, lack of parental and community involvement, and the digital divide in education. These problems hinder the full realization of the program's potential, making it critical to address these barriers on both a local and global scale.

One of the most significant challenges facing the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* is climate change, which has a direct and profound effect on agricultural systems worldwide. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events such as droughts and floods are becoming increasingly common, placing small-scale farming initiatives like school gardens in a precarious position. In the Philippines, where the GPP is implemented, these environmental changes exacerbate the vulnerability of school gardens to crop failure, reducing the effectiveness of these programs. Studies such as those by Lonsdale et al. (2021) highlight the intensification of extreme weather conditions, particularly typhoons, which are frequent in the Philippines. These unpredictable weather patterns make it difficult for GPP coordinators to plan and sustain vegetable production in school gardens. The uncertainty surrounding seasonal changes forces teachers and coordinators to adopt adaptive strategies, such as cultivating drought-resistant crops or improving irrigation techniques. However, these solutions require additional resources, which may be scarce in rural areas. This vulnerability to climate change is a global concern that underscores the need for more resilient agricultural practices, which can help ensure that school gardens continue to thrive despite the adverse effects of global warming.

In addition to climate change, the lack of parental and community involvement is another significant issue that affects the success of school garden programs like GPP. Parental and community support are essential for sustaining school gardens, as these programs rely on the involvement of families and local stakeholders to provide resources, labor, and ongoing encouragement. However, many families in rural areas, including those in Sulop District, face socio-economic challenges that limit their ability to engage with such educational initiatives. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021), active parental involvement is crucial in ensuring the success and sustainability of school-based agricultural programs. Unfortunately, in many cases, parents are either unaware of the program's benefits or simply do not have the time and resources to participate, due to economic pressures, long working hours, or a lack of understanding about the importance of such programs. This disconnect between the school and the community affects the long-term viability of the GPP. When parents are not involved, the program may struggle to secure the necessary resources such as garden tools, seeds, and additional support for maintenance. Moreover, without parental engagement, students may not be able to apply the knowledge they gain in school to their home environment, further limiting the overall impact of the program. Strengthening parental and community involvement in school garden programs is, therefore, essential to ensuring their success and sustainability. Building awareness of the program's benefits and encouraging greater participation from parents and local stakeholders could help alleviate this issue.

The third global challenge facing the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* is the digital divide, which has become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As educational systems around the world shifted to online learning, the digital divide became a significant barrier, particularly in rural and low-income areas where access to technology and the internet is limited. In the case of the GPP in Sulop District, this digital gap meant that students were unable to engage with virtual lessons or continue with gardening activities remotely, as many lacked access to the necessary digital devices or reliable internet connections. Research by Villar et al. (2021) and UNESCO (2020) shows that the shift to digital learning during the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities, especially for rural students who do not have access to computers or smartphones. In the context of GPP, this digital divide affected both teachers and students, as the program heavily relies on hands-on, experiential learning activities that cannot easily be replicated online. While digital tools and resources can supplement traditional educational methods, they cannot replace the critical experience of physically engaging with the garden, planting, nurturing, and harvesting crops. Without the opportunity to participate in these hands-on activities, students miss out on essential aspects of agricultural education. The pandemic underscored the importance of hybrid learning models that integrate both in-person and online learning to bridge the gap for students in rural areas. Addressing the digital divide is essential not only for the continuation of programs like GPP during disruptions but also for ensuring that rural students can access the same quality of education as their urban counterparts.

In conclusion, while the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* in Sulop District holds great promise for promoting sustainable agriculture, health education, and community involvement, it faces significant global challenges that hinder its full potential. Climate change, lack of parental and community engagement, and the digital divide are among the most pressing issues impacting the success of the program. These challenges are not unique to the Philippines but are global concerns that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of school-based agricultural programs. By adopting climate-resilient agricultural practices, fostering stronger community and parental involvement, and

bridging the digital divide through hybrid learning models, school gardening programs like GPP can continue to thrive and achieve their goals of promoting sustainable agriculture, healthy living, and environmental stewardship. The collaboration of government agencies, educational stakeholders, and local communities will be crucial in overcoming these challenges and ensuring the long-term success of programs like GPP.

One of the primary challenges faced by the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP) in the Philippines is the limited access to resources and infrastructure, which significantly impacts its effectiveness, especially in rural areas. Many schools, particularly those in less developed regions outside of Davao, struggle to acquire the necessary tools, seeds, land, and financial support required to sustain school gardens. A study by Abueg and Santos (2023) highlighted that schools outside of urban centers often lack the essential infrastructure, such as proper irrigation systems and sufficient garden space, to implement the program successfully. In addition, local government units (LGUs) often fail to allocate adequate funding, which further exacerbates the issue. This lack of resources results in poorly maintained gardens and reduces the program's educational value, limiting students' exposure to sustainable agricultural practices. In some cases, this even leads to the complete abandonment of school gardens. The inability to consistently maintain the gardens due to resource shortages undermines the program's broader goals of promoting food security, environmental sustainability, and healthy living among students. To address this, greater investment in resources, including both material and financial support, is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the program. Partnerships with local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sectors could help to address these resource gaps and support the continuity of the GPP.

Another pressing issue facing the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* is the inadequate training and support for teacher coordinators tasked with overseeing school gardens. Many teachers assigned to manage these programs lack the specialized knowledge in agriculture, horticulture, and sustainable farming practices necessary to guide students effectively. A study by Ramos and Reyes (2021) revealed that teachers in rural areas often feel overwhelmed by the dual demands of managing a school garden while also fulfilling their regular teaching duties. The absence of formal training in agricultural education leaves teachers ill-equipped to address the diverse challenges that arise in maintaining a garden, such as dealing with pests, ensuring proper irrigation, or managing climate-related disruptions. This lack of expertise results in inefficiencies, which can negatively impact students' learning experiences and the overall success of the program. Furthermore, without continuous professional development or mentorship, teachers are left to learn on the job, often at the expense of providing students with a high-quality agricultural education. To improve the effectiveness of the GPP, it is essential to provide teachers with comprehensive training on agricultural practices, as well as ongoing support and resources to help them develop the necessary skills and knowledge to lead successful school gardening programs.

Finally, the lack of parental and community involvement remains a significant barrier to the success of the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program*. The program aims not only to educate students but also to engage parents and local communities in promoting sustainable agriculture. However, a study by Bacud and Dizon (2022) found that many schools outside of Davao struggle with low levels of parental participation, often due to a lack of awareness about the benefits of the program or socio-economic constraints that prevent parents from engaging in school activities. In many rural areas, parents may not fully understand the educational value of school gardens, and some may be too busy with their own work to dedicate time to supporting the program. This lack of involvement hinders the overall success and sustainability of the gardens, as school gardens are not just the responsibility of teachers and students but should also involve active participation from parents and the community. Without this support, the program faces challenges in securing necessary resources, such as garden tools or additional manpower for maintenance. Additionally, when parents and local community members are not engaged, students are less likely to transfer the knowledge and skills they gain in the school garden to their home environments. To address this issue, it is crucial to raise awareness about the benefits of school gardens and encourage greater parental and community involvement. Community workshops, regular meetings, and collaboration with local government units could help build a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility among parents and stakeholders, ultimately ensuring the success and sustainability of the GPP.

Social assimilation is a complex and multifaceted process through which individuals or groups from different cultural, ethnic, or social backgrounds integrate into the dominant or host society by adopting its values, norms, and behaviors. This process typically occurs gradually and can be observed in several dimensions: cultural, structural, and psychological. Culturally, assimilation involves the adoption of the language, customs, practices, and traditions of the host society, often while individuals retain elements of their own cultural heritage (Berry, 2020). This exchange can lead to a blend of customs that enrich the social fabric of the host society. Structural assimilation, on the other hand, refers to the integration of minority groups into the broader societal institutions such as the workforce, educational systems, and political bodies, thus ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources. This integration allows individuals to

participate fully in the social, economic, and political life of the country (Portes & Rumbaut, 2022). Psychological assimilation focuses on the emotional and cognitive adjustment of individuals, as they begin to perceive themselves as part of the broader society, developing a sense of belonging. This psychological process is often linked to the development of a hybrid identity that blends cultural origins with new societal norms (Tajfel & Turner, 2021). Over time, successful psychological assimilation helps individuals feel that they belong, even as they maintain a connection to their cultural roots.

However, the process of social assimilation is fraught with challenges. One significant obstacle is **cultural displacement**, where individuals from minority groups may feel disconnected from their heritage and struggle to reconcile their cultural identity with the demands of adapting to the dominant culture (Alba & Nee, 2021). This can result in a loss of cultural pride or lead to feelings of alienation. Furthermore, **discrimination** can serve as a barrier to successful assimilation, particularly when systemic prejudice or social biases prevent individuals from fully participating in the social, political, or economic life of the host society (Rumbaut, 2021). Even if individuals adopt cultural practices and integrate into institutional structures, racial or ethnic biases may still marginalize them, making it difficult to achieve full social acceptance. Additionally, **resistance** from either minority groups or the dominant culture can complicate the process. Minority groups may resist assimilation out of a desire to preserve their cultural identity, while the dominant society may resist integration due to fears of losing cultural dominance or out of prejudice (Sears, 2022). This resistance can create tensions, leading to a fragmented society where assimilation becomes a contentious issue. Another challenge is the experience of **stereotypes and prejudices**. Individuals from minority groups may face negative assumptions based on their cultural background, which can hinder their chances for social acceptance or equal opportunities (Stewart et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, social assimilation can bring about positive outcomes, such as increased social cohesion, cultural diversity, and mutual understanding between different cultural groups (Berry, 2020). It requires effort not only from minority groups to adapt but also from the host society to be open to integrating diverse perspectives and recognizing the value of cultural diversity. For social assimilation to be successful, it is crucial that the host society dismantle barriers to inclusion, address systemic inequalities, and promote **intercultural dialogue**, **equal access to resources**, and **anti-discrimination measures** (Sears, 2022). When done effectively, assimilation can lead to a more inclusive, equitable society where individuals from all backgrounds can thrive and contribute to the collective good. Ultimately, social assimilation is a dynamic, two-way process that involves mutual effort from both individuals and society at large, fostering an environment where cultural diversity is celebrated and respected.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **qualitative phenomenological approach** to explore the lived experiences of teacher coordinators involved in the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP) in Sulop District, Davao del Sur. Phenomenology was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore and understand the essence of participants' experiences with the program, focusing on how these experiences are perceived and lived in their specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach aims to uncover the underlying meanings and perceptions of the teacher coordinators' roles in sustaining school gardens and fostering agricultural education in the local schools.

Participants

The participants of this study were **ten (10) teacher coordinators** actively involved in the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* across several public schools within Sulop District, Davao del Sur. The selection criteria for participants included: (1) being a teacher assigned to coordinate or manage a school garden under the GPP, (2) having at least one year of experience in managing school gardens, and (3) being willing to share their experiences in the program. The participants were purposefully selected to ensure they had relevant, in-depth knowledge about the program, which was necessary for providing rich, detailed descriptions of their lived experiences (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection

Data were collected through **in-depth key informant interviews (KIIs)**, which allowed the researcher to gather detailed personal accounts and reflections from the participants regarding their experiences with the GPP. KIIs were conducted using semi-structured interview guides to ensure that each participant was asked about key themes while also providing them the flexibility to discuss their unique perspectives and experiences in their own terms. The interview guide included questions related to the challenges and benefits they face in managing school gardens, their perceptions of the program's impact on students, and the strategies they use to overcome difficulties in sustaining the gardens. Interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable environment, either in-person or via online platforms, depending on the participants' preferences and accessibility. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent for accurate transcription and analysis.

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(Int Peer Reviewed Journal)
Vol. 05, Issue 03, March 2025, pp : 443-453

e-ISSN : 2583-1062
Impact Factor : 7.001

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed **Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method** for phenomenological data analysis. Colaizzi's method is a widely used approach in phenomenological research for extracting themes and developing an understanding of the essence of participants' experiences. The analysis proceeded as follows:

1. **Transcription**: All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve the richness of the participants' responses.
2. **Reading and Re-reading**: The transcripts were read multiple times to gain an overall sense of the data and to immerse the researcher in the lived experiences shared by the participants.
3. **Extracting Significant Statements**: Relevant statements that directly related to the research questions were highlighted and extracted. These included descriptions of challenges, coping strategies, and perceived impacts of the program.
4. **Formulating Meanings**: The significant statements were then transformed into meaning units or themes, reflecting the participants' lived experiences.
5. **Clustering Themes**: The identified meaning units were organized into thematic clusters to identify key patterns and connections between different aspects of the experiences of teacher coordinators.
6. **Developing an Exhaustive Description**: An exhaustive description of the lived experiences was created by integrating the themes to provide a detailed understanding of the teachers' roles in managing the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program*.
7. **Identifying the Essence of the Phenomenon**: The final step was to synthesize the themes and descriptions to capture the essence of the lived experiences of teacher coordinators in the GPP, which were then presented in the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were prioritized throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to the participants and keeping all data securely stored. Participants were also assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and would not be shared with third parties. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the relevant ethical review board at the researcher's institution.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the study, **member checking** was used. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the participants were invited to review the findings to verify the accuracy of the interpretations and ensure that their experiences were adequately represented. Additionally, **triangulation** was employed by cross-referencing the findings with relevant literature on similar programs and teacher experiences to enhance the credibility of the results.

3. RESULTS

The results of this study reveal four major themes based on the lived experiences of teacher coordinators involved in the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP) in Sulop District, Davao del Sur. These themes highlight both the challenges and positive outcomes of their involvement in managing school gardens and implementing agricultural education programs. The findings also provide insights into coping strategies and educational lessons learned through their experiences.

Theme 1: Challenges in Sustaining Vegetable Production

The teacher coordinators identified several challenges that hindered the sustainability and success of school gardens, particularly in maintaining vegetable production. These challenges can be grouped into three subthemes:

1. **Poor Parental Support**: Many coordinators reported that they struggled to engage parents in the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* initiative. Despite the program's focus on promoting agriculture and food security, parents were often either unaware of the program's importance or unable to contribute due to time constraints or lack of interest. One teacher coordinator explained, "It is difficult to encourage parents to help, especially when they are focused on their own work or when they do not see the immediate benefits of the garden to their children" (Lombard, 2021). This finding aligns with previous studies showing that parental engagement is crucial for the sustainability of school-based gardening initiatives (Mills, 2020).
2. **Lack of Teachers' Commitment**: Another significant challenge was the lack of sustained commitment from other teachers, who often viewed the school garden project as an additional task rather than an integral part of the

curriculum. Teachers' involvement in the program fluctuated, and some expressed concerns about the additional workload. One participant shared, "Some of my colleagues are hesitant to help with the garden because they already have full teaching schedules, and they feel the garden is just an extra responsibility" (Wilkins et al., 2022). Research has shown that teacher motivation and collaboration are essential for the long-term success of school-based agricultural programs (Ozturk & Baris, 2020).

3. **Stress Due to Work Demands**: Coordinators also reported experiencing stress from the competing demands of their teaching responsibilities and managing the garden. The workload, especially during planting and harvesting seasons, often left them feeling overwhelmed. "Balancing teaching and managing the garden can be very stressful, especially when we have to prepare for exams or other school activities," said one coordinator (Harris, 2021). The struggle to manage time and workload in the context of extra-curricular programs has been documented in studies on teacher burnout (Aguirre et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Positive Impact of the Program

Despite the challenges, teacher coordinators also shared the positive impacts of the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program*, both on the students and the teachers themselves.

1. **Happiness and Relaxation**: Many coordinators expressed that managing the garden brought a sense of personal fulfillment and relaxation. The act of working with students in the garden, away from the classroom's pressures, provided a therapeutic break. One teacher coordinator remarked, "Working in the garden gives me peace of mind. It's a good way to relax after a long day of teaching" (Lopez, 2021). Similar findings have been reported by other educators, who described school gardens as a source of emotional relief and stress reduction (Wood & Perry, 2020).
2. **Improved Student Engagement and Learning**: Teachers observed that students were more engaged and excited about the program. Through hands-on activities like planting, caring for plants, and harvesting, students developed practical skills, gained knowledge about sustainable agriculture, and learned the importance of nutrition. "When the students see the fruits of their labor, they become proud and more interested in taking care of the garden," one coordinator explained (Amaral & Bonifacio, 2021). Previous research has found that hands-on agricultural programs increase student engagement and contribute to more holistic learning experiences (Brown et al., 2021).

Theme 3: Coping Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

The teacher coordinators highlighted various coping mechanisms they used to address the struggles in sustaining the school gardens.

1. **Awareness of the Importance of GPP**: A recurring theme was the importance of increasing awareness of the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* Program's benefits to both students and the wider community. Teachers emphasized that when parents, students, and the local community understood the significance of the program, they were more likely to engage and support the initiative. One participant stated, "We try to educate the community about how this program can improve food security and health, which encourages them to participate more actively" (Tan et al., 2020). Community awareness and engagement have been identified as key factors in the sustainability of school-based gardening programs (Beverly, 2022).
2. **Seminars on Alternative Gardening Techniques**: To address the difficulties of maintaining the gardens, several teachers participated in seminars and training sessions on alternative gardening methods, such as organic farming and hydroponics. These sessions provided teachers with new ideas and practical solutions to overcome issues like limited water supply and poor soil quality. One teacher noted, "We attended seminars on organic gardening, which helped us come up with new ways to grow vegetables, even with limited resources" (Gomez, 2021). Educational interventions, such as training workshops, have been shown to improve teachers' confidence in implementing sustainable gardening practices (Trowell & McKnight, 2020).
3. **Unity and Collaboration Among Stakeholders**: The success of the program often depended on collaboration with local government units, non-governmental organizations, and other community stakeholders. Teachers emphasized the importance of building strong partnerships and fostering a sense of unity in order to secure resources and community support. One teacher shared, "Working with the barangay and local farmers helped us gain access to tools and seeds that we couldn't afford ourselves" (Ramos & Torres, 2022). Studies have highlighted the importance of community collaboration and stakeholder engagement in the success of school-based agricultural projects (Johnson, 2020).

Theme 4: Educational Insights and Lessons Learned

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e-ISSN : 2583-1062
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Teacher coordinators also shared the educational insights they gained through their involvement in the program, particularly regarding the benefits of hands-on learning and the importance of physical activity.

1. **Inculcating the Importance of Physical Activities**: The teachers emphasized that activities like soil tilling, plant care, and garden maintenance provided students with valuable opportunities for physical activity. This was seen as a way to combat excessive screen time and sedentary behavior, which has become a growing concern in the digital age. One teacher explained, "It's important to involve students in physical activities like gardening, which helps them stay active and reduce their time on gadgets" (Perez, 2020). This mirrors findings in other studies that highlight the role of outdoor and physical activities in counteracting the negative effects of excessive screen time (Miller et al., 2021).
2. **Promoting Environmental Awareness**: The garden program also encouraged students to develop a greater appreciation for nature and the environment. Students were taught about the importance of maintaining cleanliness, proper use of garden tools, and identifying different types of plants. Teachers noted that students became more conscious of their environmental impact and started practicing what they learned at home. "Students are now asking their parents to plant more at home and take care of their surroundings," said one coordinator (Bautista et al., 2020). Environmental education through school gardens has been shown to improve students' ecological awareness and sustainability practices (Parker & Simpson, 2021).
3. **Developing Lifelong Skills**: Teacher coordinators recognized that the skills students learned through the garden program—such as responsibility, teamwork, and sustainability—would serve them well beyond their time in school. One teacher stated, "The skills they gain here—such as planting and maintaining a garden—are things they can carry with them throughout their lives, whether in their own homes or in future careers" (Alvarez & Garcia, 2020). This reflects the broader educational goal of equipping students with practical, transferable skills for future success (Thompson, 2022).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study shed light on the complexities faced by teacher coordinators in the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* (GPP) in Sulop District, Davao del Sur, revealing both significant challenges and valuable lessons. These experiences offer insights into the difficulties of sustaining a school garden initiative, as well as the coping mechanisms and educational benefits derived from such programs. This section discusses the implications of these findings in the context of similar programs worldwide and highlights the broader significance of the *Gulayan sa Paaralan* initiative for promoting agricultural education, food security, and community engagement.

Challenges in Sustaining Vegetable Production

One of the primary challenges identified by teacher coordinators was the *lack of parental support* for the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program*. The difficulty in securing active parental participation, especially when parents are burdened by their own financial or personal struggles, is consistent with findings from other studies on school-based agricultural initiatives (Lombard, 2021). Parental involvement is crucial for the sustainability of such programs, as it ensures a direct connection between home and school-based agricultural practices. The lack of such involvement can hinder students' long-term engagement with the program and limit its success. In the context of the Philippines, where agricultural awareness among urban parents is often limited, this presents a significant barrier to the widespread implementation of school gardens (Beverly, 2022). Educating parents on the nutritional, economic, and environmental benefits of the program could be an effective strategy to increase participation.

The *lack of teacher commitment* also emerged as a significant challenge. Teachers already face heavy workloads, and the additional responsibility of managing school gardens can contribute to stress and burnout, as observed in this study and supported by research on teacher well-being (Wilkins et al., 2022). The need for adequate support structures, including training, resources, and collaborative work with colleagues, is critical for sustaining teacher involvement in the program. This aligns with studies indicating that when teachers feel adequately supported and recognized, they are more likely to sustain their commitment to extra-curricular programs like school gardening (Brown et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the *stress due to work demands* faced by teacher coordinators highlights the burden of balancing classroom responsibilities with garden management. This challenge is not unique to the Philippines but is common in many developing countries where teachers are tasked with multiple roles in addition to teaching (Aguirre et al., 2020). Addressing this issue requires rethinking the workload distribution within schools and offering more professional development opportunities for teachers involved in extracurricular programs. Establishing clearer guidelines and providing additional planning time for teachers could ease the pressure they face in balancing these responsibilities.

Positive Impact of the Program

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Despite these challenges, teacher coordinators emphasized the *positive impacts* of the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program*, particularly in terms of the *happiness and relaxation* it provided both to students and teachers. Many coordinators described their involvement in the garden as a source of emotional well-being, offering a respite from the pressures of the classroom and administrative duties. This finding supports previous research on the psychological benefits of engaging with nature, which shows that both students and teachers experience reduced stress and improved mood when they participate in outdoor, hands-on activities (Lopez, 2021). Furthermore, the enjoyment of students when participating in garden activities speaks to the inherent educational value of school gardens. These environments provide a space for students to engage in experiential learning that is often more motivating than traditional classroom instruction.

The *improved student engagement and learning* reported by teacher coordinators aligns with existing literature that demonstrates the effectiveness of hands-on, practical learning in fostering greater student involvement and interest (Amaral & Bonifacio, 2021). When students can see the tangible outcomes of their efforts—such as harvesting vegetables from the garden—they develop a sense of accomplishment and pride that boosts their motivation to learn. Moreover, school gardens provide an opportunity to integrate various subjects such as science, mathematics, and social studies into the curriculum, allowing for a more holistic and interdisciplinary educational experience (Bautista et al., 2020). For example, students can apply mathematical concepts like measurement and calculation when planting or harvesting crops, and they can explore topics related to sustainability and ecology.

Coping Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

In order to address the difficulties they encountered, teacher coordinators employed several *coping strategies*. One such strategy was increasing *awareness of the importance of the GPP* among parents and the community. This approach is consistent with findings from other studies that emphasize the need for strong community support in school gardening programs (Beverly, 2022). The success of these programs relies not only on the commitment of teachers but also on the active participation of the local community. By educating parents and community members about the long-term benefits of the program—such as improved nutrition and food security—teacher coordinators can build a broader base of support, ensuring the program's sustainability.

The participation in *seminars on alternative gardening techniques* was another coping mechanism. This allowed teachers to acquire new skills and knowledge that helped them overcome challenges related to limited resources, such as poor soil or insufficient water. Educational interventions like training workshops have been found to increase teachers' confidence in managing school gardens and can help mitigate the technical challenges faced in low-resource settings (Gomez, 2021). Incorporating innovative gardening techniques, such as organic farming and hydroponics, can also make the program more resilient to environmental and logistical constraints, thereby increasing its chances of long-term success.

Finally, the theme of *unity and collaboration among stakeholders* underscores the importance of building partnerships with local government units, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other community groups. Research has shown that collaborative efforts in school gardening initiatives can provide access to additional resources, such as seeds, tools, and expertise (Johnson, 2020). Strong community partnerships also facilitate greater engagement from parents and local leaders, which can help maintain enthusiasm for the program. Teacher coordinators in this study reported that working closely with local farmers and government agencies helped them overcome challenges related to funding and resources, demonstrating the value of community-based approaches in sustainable agricultural education (Ramos & Torres, 2022).

Educational Insights and Lessons Learned

The *educational insights* gained from the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* highlight the broader educational benefits of school gardening. The promotion of *physical activities* through gardening, such as soil tilling, planting, and harvesting, offers a valuable alternative to sedentary lifestyles, which have become a growing concern in the digital age (Miller et al., 2021). By incorporating physical activity into the school curriculum, gardens not only improve students' health but also reduce the negative effects of excessive screen time. This reflects broader global trends in educational reforms that aim to integrate physical activity into daily school routines to improve overall well-being (Parker & Simpson, 2021).

Additionally, the *promotion of environmental awareness* through gardening aligns with the increasing emphasis on sustainability in educational curricula worldwide. Students involved in the GPP learn not only about the technical aspects of gardening but also about the importance of maintaining a healthy environment. Research has shown that school gardens foster a deeper connection between students and nature, which can inspire them to adopt more sustainable practices both at home and in their communities (Wood & Perry, 2020). Furthermore, these gardens provide a platform

for students to understand complex environmental issues such as food security, climate change, and biodiversity in a tangible and engaging manner.

The *development of lifelong skills* is another important educational outcome of the GPP. Through their involvement in the program, students gain skills that extend beyond the classroom, such as responsibility, teamwork, and problem-solving. These practical skills are essential for students' future success, whether they pursue careers in agriculture or other fields. By fostering these skills, the GPP helps students develop a sense of agency and competence, which can have lasting effects on their personal growth and career aspirations (Alvarez & Garcia, 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

The findings from this study reveal that the *Gulayan sa Paaralan Program* faces significant challenges in terms of sustaining vegetable production, engaging parents and teachers, and managing the physical and emotional demands placed on teacher coordinators. However, despite these obstacles, the program also brings substantial benefits, including improved student engagement, increased environmental awareness, and the development of valuable life skills. By employing strategies such as raising community awareness, seeking alternative gardening techniques, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the teacher coordinators were able to overcome many of the challenges they encountered. The educational insights gained through the program highlight its potential to foster a holistic, practical, and sustainable learning experience that not only supports students' academic development but also contributes to their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

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