

# Grade 10 Students' Lived Experiences of Learning English in Congested Classrooms

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## Abstract

This study aimed to understand the experiences of grade 10 students in learning English in a congested classroom. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological research design to gather the data, employing in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). There were 14 participants in this study: 7 for IDI and 7 for FGD. This study is gleaned through Edward Lazear's Economic Theory of Class Size, which states that how class size affects learning outcomes varies according to the behaviors of learners. Participants' experiences revealed five themes, which include a distractive learning environment, having limited time, failure to enhance English macro skills, difficulty in accomplishing group tasks, and difficulty in classroom management. From their coping strategies, four themes emerged: motivating oneself, developing study habits, encouraging others to speak in English, and consulting English teachers and parents. Meanwhile, five major themes emerged from the insights of the participants, which emphasized that learning English in a congested classroom requires skilled teachers, asks for curriculum enhancement, calls for a limited classroom population, and needs a conducive learning environment. Results implied that English teachers' competence in inculcating language learning to the learners who are victims of struggles in congested classrooms is important. Thus, equal and sufficient distribution of learning and attention is encouraged despite the challenges of time scarcity and classroom congestion. Also, it was recommended that future researchers explore the enhancement of English macro skills in a congested classroom and the advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling in secondary schools.

**Keywords:** Quality Education, Learning English, Congested Classrooms, Qualitative-Phenomenological

## 1. Introduction

Classroom is the home in the school where learners are ought to develop their intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. The primary element of classroom environment is the physical setting. According to AL-Maktoumi & Kiyumi (2024) there is greater interaction in small classrooms than in large ones. However, nowadays, many problems are observed existing in the classroom's physical environment including classroom congestion.

In Ghana, the study of Likuru & Mwila (2022) revealed that educators defined overcrowded classrooms as "stressful" due to insufficient learning environments, safety and health concerns, limited contact between pupils and educators, disruptive behavior, emotional and mental challenges for educators, increased workload and insufficient time in the classroom, among others. In Sudan, crowded classrooms negatively affected communicative language teaching and learning (Morjakole, 2023). Also, in Tanzania, In Tanzania, public secondary schools exceeded against the access bargain of 45 students per class, which resulted to limitations of the application and implementation of competence-based curriculum and

supportive classroom management practices (Osai et al., 2021). Meanwhile, in Turkey, overcrowded classes is one of the most important barriers of English language teaching with consideration on the limited class hours per week (Küçükler & Kodal, 2019). Also, in Indonesia, the main problems being faced in overcrowded classes include noise making, lack of individual attention, and classroom management issues (Sudrajat, 2021). Furthermore, in Saudi Arabia, Ashraf (2021) found that some major problems of overcrowded EFL classrooms included failure to maintain classroom discipline, demotivation of both teacher and learner, failure to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of each learner, teachers' struggle to deal with physical and mental stress, failure to achieve course learning outcomes, and failure to create sound teacher-student relationship and establish effective teaching environment.

In the Philippines, congested classrooms caused difficulty to concentrate on lessons, limitation of cooperative learning and group work, over-stressed teachers, and strained relationship between teacher and students (Jones, 2017). According to Lapes et al. (2024), students' well-being and learning processes are certainly affected by classroom congestion. Furthermore, a report on OECD, Education at a Glance, stated that in a crowded classroom, there is less time spent on actual teaching and learning since more time is spent on keeping order (Philippine Basic Education, 2015).

Various studies were already conducted about the causes and effects of congested classrooms. However, no study yet was conducted about students' experiences and perceptions about learning English in a congested classroom. Thus, there is a need to address the experiences of students in learning English in a congested classroom.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and understand the experiences of students in learning English in a congested classroom in one of the private schools in Panabo City. At this stage in the research, classroom congestion was generally defined as a phenomenon that causes hard concentration on learning English and limit the teacher's time for each student. This research work sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of students in learning English in a congested classroom?
2. How do students cope with the challenges they experienced in learning English in a congested classroom?
3. What are the insights of students about learning English in a congested classroom that can be shared to others?

### **Theoretical Lens**

The idea of this study was gleaned through Edward Lazear's Economic Theory of Class Size which stated that optimal class size varies directly with the quality of students. The theory implied that smaller classes provide better results for students who are disadvantaged and need special attention. On the other hand, mixing non-disruptive students with disruptive ones will cause a problem to the educational output. Moreover, a classroom filled with disruptive individuals does not produce much learning. That is to say, how the class size affects learning outcome varies according to the behaviors of a group of learners (Lazear, 2001).

Additionally, in a multidimensional classroom where the class is crowded with people, tasks, and time pressures, classroom management requires much work to do. William Glasser's Choice Theory (1998) stated that teachers cannot directly control the behaviors of students. Whether the classroom is congested or not, it will less likely affect classroom behavior since students have freedom to choose how to behave. The theory suggested that although students cannot be directly controlled, teachers can help students identify circumstances that trigger their behavior. Accordingly, the theory emphasized that external

influences are not as significant in behavior changes as factors relating to the students' basic needs that constitute the source of their internal motivation, which are survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun (Gabriel and Matthews, 2011).

Regarding students' behavior changes, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, formerly Social Learning Theory, asserted that learning occurs in a social context with dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior, where people can witness, observe, and imitate behavior conducted by others. Since learning behavior is affected by the environment, the theory assumed that any changes to the environment may lead to changes in the person as well. Consequently, when a passive learner is mixed with active learners, the student may acquire the learning styles of the other students. Conversely, when an active learner is mixed with passive learners, the student may lose motivation or acquire the behavior of other students, and the learner's performance may diminish (Bandura, 1971).

### **Limitation and Delimitation**

This study focused on determining the experiences of learning English in a congested classroom from the perception of Junior High School students in learning English in congested classrooms in a particular school in the Philippines. Although the study underwent planned procedures, there were some unavoidable limitations and weaknesses. First, since the study was only conducted on a specific group of English learners, the results did not guarantee similar data for different groups of learners, considering that the environment of different schools varies. Second, since the participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, it could be difficult to convince others that the overall findings would still hold true if different options were used.

## **2. Methods**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations to give them meaning (Burns and Groove, 2014). Accordingly, I employed qualitative phenomenological research to gain understanding of the experiences and underlying behavior of students in learning English in congested classrooms. This approach suited the study since direct interaction with participants provided clear and realistic information about their experiences and how they dealt with it. Specifically, phenomenological approach suited the investigation since the primary purpose of this study was to understand the experiences and behavior of students in relation to learning English in congested classrooms.

### **Sampling Technique**

In this study, I used purposive sampling technique wherein members of the sample have a shared set of characteristics (Foley, 2018). Further, I followed the suggestion of Creswell (2013) that selection of participants in a phenomenological study should have a total number of five to twenty-five key informants. In this study, I selected fourteen participants: seven (7) for focus group discussion (FGD) and seven (7) for in-depth interview (IDI). The participants of the study were selected using the following criteria: first, participants should be Grade 10 Junior High School students; second, participants should be students who experience learning English in a congested classroom at present; third, they should be classroom officers; and fourth, they should be able and willing to talk about their lived experiences in learning English in a congested classroom. Students who were not able or willing to talk about their lived experiences were excluded as participants of the study. Qualitative researches are engaged in a series of activities in the process of collecting data.

### Data Analysis

In a qualitative research, data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, observation notes, or non-textual materials that the researcher collects to increase the understanding of a certain phenomenon (Wong et al., 2013). In this study, all the audio records that were taken down were transcribed. Then, the results were analysed according to the research questions using coding and thematic analysis. In analyzing the data gathered in this study, initially, I employed coding. Coding is a step toward a rigorous and evocative analysis and interpretation (Saldana, 2013). Through coding, I was able to assign a word or short phrase that symbolizes the summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a visual data and assign data with categories.

Consequently, I employed thematic analysis. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) stated that thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2013) suggested that thematic analysis has to be learned first because it provides core skills that will be useful for any kind of analysis. In this study, I used Braun and Clarke’s (2013) six-phase framework which made me able to do the following: familiarized the data, generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed themes, defined themes, and wrote-up the results of the theming process. Moreover, I sought the assistance of my data analyst and adviser to ensure that responses were analyzed carefully based on the core ideas, hence coming up with appropriate conclusions and recommendations.

### 3. Results And Discussions

#### A. Students’ Experiences in Learning English in Congested Classrooms

On the first question posed on the experiences of students in learning English in a congested classroom, participants revealed their views regarding learning English in a congested classroom. From the negative experiences of the participants, I have extracted five (5) major themes. These include: (1) distractive learning environment; (2) having limited time; (3) failure to enhance English macro skills; (4) difficulty in accomplishing group tasks; and (5) difficulty in classroom management.

**Table 1: Themes and Core Ideas on Students’ Experiences in Learning English in Congested Classrooms**

| Themes                           | Core Ideas  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Distractive Learning Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noisy and muggy classroom causes difficulty in listening and discomfort in learning.</li> <li>• Passive students distract the focus of active students.</li> <li>• Teacher’s instructions or questions are difficult to hear because of the noise.</li> <li>• Students who want to listen find it difficult to motivate their fellow learners.</li> <li>• The inconvenient climate of the classroom causes students to sleep.</li> </ul> |
| Having Limited Time              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less preparation for group performances.</li> <li>• Allotted time for English subject is not enough to ensure fun and satisfactory learning.</li> <li>• Scarcity of time impedes speaking development of every student.</li> <li>• Scarcity of time hinders use of learning facilities such as speech lab.</li> </ul>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitation of time limits learning.</li> </ul>  |
| Failure to Enhance English Macro Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noise distracts listening and reading.</li> <li>• Understanding a text when reading is affected by noise.</li> <li>• Speaking is distracted when the teacher interrupts a student because of the necessity to reprimand misbehaving students.</li> <li>• Teachers don't have enough time to write corrections and comments on every paper.</li> <li>• Many students in congested classroom speak in mother tongue.</li> </ul> |
| Difficulty in Accomplishing Group Tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designating tasks is time-consuming.</li> <li>• Some students ignore responsibilities.</li> <li>• More time is consumed in arguments and scolding misbehaving members.</li> </ul>   |
| Difficulty in Classroom Management      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The voice of the teacher is not audible to all learners especially those sitting in the back.</li> <li>• Students do not receive adequate attention from the teacher.</li> <li>• The voice of the students overpowers the voice of the teacher.</li> </ul>  |

Results show that while in learning English in a congested classroom, students experience distractive learning environment, limited time, failure to enhance English macro skills, difficulty in accomplishing group tasks, and difficulty in classroom management. In this context, Morrow & Pendlebury (2010) stressed that social distractions cannot be avoided in crowded classrooms because the space is cramped and noise level is high. Also, Rivard (2017) claimed that having a class with beyond thirty (30) students and a one-hour teaching time means that the teacher will ultimately have more trouble teaching, and there will be too many disruptions. On the other hand, Fatma (2016) cited that there is imbalance in exposure and distribution of the four macro skills in congested classrooms. Besides, Marais (2016) suggested that crowded classes are noisy and prone to physical contact between students which may lead to disciplinary problems.

### B. Students' Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges They Encountered

On the second question posed on how students cope with the challenges they encounter in learning English in a congested classroom, four (4) major themes emerged which include (1) motivating one's self; (2) developing study habits; (3) encouraging others to speak in English; and (4) consulting English teachers and parents.

**Table 2: Themes and Core Ideas on Students' Coping Mechanisms with the Challenges Encountered**

| Major Themes          | Core Ideas  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Motivating One's Self | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I control myself to listen clearly despite the noise.</li> <li>• I focus on the teacher.</li> <li>• I focus and determine myself to learn.</li> <li>• I focus on what I really want to learn.</li> <li>• I try my best to listen and focus to the teacher no matter how noisy the classroom is.</li> </ul> |



|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I sit in front or near the teacher to clearly hear his or her voice.</li> </ul>   |
| Developing Study Habits                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I study at home when I do not understand the lesson in school.</li> <li>• I do research on my own at home or at school.</li> <li>• I do not just depend one resource; I refer to different learning materials.</li> </ul> |
| Encouraging Others to Speak in English  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I speak English in the classroom to improve grammar.</li> <li>• I speak English aloud to catch the attention of my classmates.</li> <li>• I speak English to inspire other students.</li> </ul>                           |
| Consulting English Teachers and Parents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I personally clarify ambiguous things to my English teacher.</li> <li>• I ask my parents to help me out when there are things I can't understand.</li> </ul>  |

Results show that students cope with the challenges they encounter in learning English in a congested classroom through motivating themselves, developing study habits, encouraging others to speak in English, and consulting English teachers and parents. In line with this, Alizadeh (2016) cited that motivation has a key role in the development of language skills. It is an important factor in learning English which is influenced by different challenges in a crowded classroom. In terms of developing study habits, studying at home helps clarify ambiguous things to ensure learning. On the other hand, Rao (2016) stated that speaking in English in the classroom encourages other students to think in English, thus engaging students. Furthermore, Ricker (2018) claimed that clarification is essential to ensure understanding and obtain essential information. Also, Podar (2024) suggested that parents can help their children by being informed about their learning environment and development, and by lending support and guidance.

### C. Students' Insights about Learning English in Congested Classrooms

On the third question posed on the insights of students about learning English in a congested classroom that can be shared to others, four (4) major themes emerged after the analysis of data. Participants suggest that learning English in a congested classroom (1) requires skilled teachers; (2) asks for curriculum enhancement; (3) calls for limit of classroom population; and (4) provide conducive learning environment.

**Table 3: Themes and Core Ideas on Students' Insights about Learning English in Congested Classrooms**

| Major Themes                            | Core Ideas  |
|---|---|
| Requires Skilled Teachers               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to manage the congested classroom environment and distribute equal learning and attention to all learners is needed.</li> <li>• It is helpful to make learning fun and educational.</li> <li>• Teacher's speaking voice and communication skills affect students' motivation.</li> </ul> |
| Asks for Curriculum Enhancement         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four-Subjects-A-Day Program, with 2 Learning hours for English need to be implemented.</li> <li>• The mother-tongue subject should be omitted in the primary levels in the basic education curriculum.</li> </ul>  |
| Calls for Limit of Classroom Population | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum number of students in a classroom shall be strictly imposed.</li> <li>• Shifting of classes can be a temporary solution to classroom congestion.</li> </ul>  |

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| Provide Conducive Learning Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New schools need to be built.</li><li>• New spacious classrooms conducive for learning is needed.</li></ul> |
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Results show that the problems related to learning English in a congested classroom requires skilled teachers, curriculum enhancement, limit of classroom population, and conducive learning environment. On this note, Soper (2018) argued that learning does not have to suffer because of the crowded classrooms. It is possible to foster growth in even most overcrowded settings when teachers get creative with their planning and design choices. Moreover, Liebttag and Ryerse (2017) cited that four-by-four block scheduling is an effective solution for the problem of crowded classrooms. In addition, Garrett-Hatfield (2017) highlighted that double shift schools in developing countries reduce overcrowding and allow maximum use of resources. Furthermore, Salaudeen cited Kennedy's (1996) verdict that it is difficult to overcome the occurrences in the classroom when the number of students exceeds a certain limit. Nevertheless, Jones (2017) stressed that improving the learning environment for secondary schools shall be the utmost priority of the government if we want good quality of education. In accordance to this, Tayrus (2017) pointed out that high quality of education may be achieved if more classrooms will be provided.

#### 4. Implications And Conclusions

##### Implications for Teaching Practice

The results confirm the importance of English teachers' competence in inculcating language learning to the learners who are victims of struggles in congested classrooms. Definitely, it is the responsibility of the English teacher to ensure that each student will have enhanced the four macro skills of English. Furthermore, English teachers need skills to manage the distractive behavior of students in congested classrooms. On the other hand, distribution of learning and attention is encouraged despite the fact that the time is scarce and the classroom is crowded. English teachers are advised to eliminate the boring perception about English subject by capitalizing on students' talents and interests. Students nowadays are fond of movies and video clips. Also, the use of audio devices to louden teacher's voice such as microphones or lapel is necessary, especially because in English, learners need to hear the correct delivery of words. Accordingly, English teachers need to ensure accurate pronunciation of words to avoid wrong delivery of instructions and learning. Furthermore, English teachers shall not totally ban mother tongue in the classroom. Mother tongue is needed to deepen understanding of a certain topic. On this note, grammar translation plays an important part in the comprehension of students and in applying literature to real-life situations. Hence, English teachers shall create a friendly English learning environment by knowing when to allow the use of mother tongue and when to strictly require students to speak in English.

##### Implications for Further Research

Further research is encouraged to help improve students' learning development in English in congested classrooms. Future researchers may delve more on the specific experiences of the students as mentioned in the results of this study, such as the effectiveness of implementation of English only policy during English classes, barriers in speaking English, enhancement of each of the English macro skills in a congested classroom, and advantages and disadvantages of block scheduling of classes for secondary schools.

##### Concluding Remarks

Learning English in a congested classroom is indeed challenging. Congested classroom may not be directly and exclusively related to any scope of English discipline but it is not strange to our ears that

learning environment is one major factor that affects learning. Digging deeper into the disciplines of English will ensure productivity of learning. It is absolutely important to consider why students are having difficulty in learning English and in enhancing the language skills in congested classrooms.

I have concluded in this study that the biggest challenge in learning English in a congested classroom is the combat with scarcity of time. Students are naturally naughty sometimes, but they will take things seriously once they know its significance. Unfortunately, limited time is a hindrance in getting into the lives of each student when there are many of them. An hour for an English teacher is not adequate to emphasize the role of each learner in the learning process. In addition, learning English in a congested classroom is challenging for both teachers and students, and there is a greater need to consider the challenges they are encountering rather than giving them too many paperwork to comply. It is observable that teachers nowadays become busier with their paperwork rather than monitoring the learning and behavior of their children. Besides a bundle of paperwork is an additional load to the shoulders of teachers who are handling forty students and beyond.

Thus, increasing student motivation needs to be set as the supreme priority, and teachers cannot do it alone. The student-teacher ratio needs to be reconsidered to guarantee equal and adequate attention from the teacher to the students. As to observations, majority of students nowadays are products of broken families and Overseas Filipino Workers because of the demands of the society today. Basically, these students need time, attention, and love more than the quantity of allowance that their parents abroad can give them. On this note, the number of students in a classroom has to be lessened.

On the whole, human beings can manipulate the environment. They can make classroom congestion advantageous. If English teachers are in love with teaching, learners are motivated to learn, parents make time for their children, and school administrators provide support, then learning English may be challenging yet fun and satisfying.

## 5. Conflict of Interest

The author declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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