

Teachers' Disempowering Practices in School Setting

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study was to explore the common disempowering practices among teachers, their effects to the students' academic performance and emotional well-being, and the suggestions to mitigate disempowering practices. The research used a qualitative design and the data were gathered through an interview with six teachers and six students from a public and private schools. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis using Creswell's Framework for Analyzing Qualitative Data. The research study revealed the common disempowering practices in school identified by both students and teachers which include: restrictive communication rules, appearance-related regulations, public shaming, no cellphone policy, seating arrangements, and unfair grading. These practices were found to reduce students' motivation, decline academic performance, and negatively impact students' emotional well-being, resulting to anxiety, trauma, loss of self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. In order to mitigate these impacts, students and teachers suggested improving fairness, empathy, open communication, opportunities for self-expression, training, and respect to boundaries. The study emphasizes that adapting a more flexible and supportive teaching strategies, instead of controlling and restrictive practices, could not only improve students' academic performance but also nurture their confidence and motivation to learn.

KEYWORDS: disempowering practices, academic performance, emotional well-being, self-determination theory, restrictive communication rules

I. INTRODUCTION

The school is known as an institution that aims to create individuals who are knowledgeable and empowered, but it can also become a place where students are undermined. Teachers are considered as the foundation of a healthy school environment; however, their authority sometimes becomes oppressive that leads to disempowering practices. "Disempowering practices refers to ways of thinking and acting that may disqualify, constrain or supplant people's participation and influence in their lives" Madsen (1999), as cited in Madsen, 2005. Such practices are censorship or silencing, undue control, biased disciplinary action, and disciplinary measures like not allowing breaks, disproportionate sanctions, and public humiliation (Metz et al., 2024).

According to Freire (2020), the disempowering practices are reflected in the traditional banking approaches in education where teachers serve as the sole source of information or the only authority and the students are treated as the passive recipients of knowledge unable to actively participate and think critically. This traditional system in education reinforces students to be silent and avoid resistance that results to suppressing their awareness and enforcing compliance. And, it was found that teachers' overly strict management of students impacts students' academic performance (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, as cited in Peng & Huang, 2024).

There are different types of oppression and disempowerment that are involved in school setting, however, most of the existing studies only focus on a single form such as racial and gender discrimination. And, there are limited or deficient study on the understanding of how multiple forms of disempowering practices co-occur in school setting, such as race, gender, socio-economic status, and even disability. The study of Kyere et al., (2023) shows a lot of limitations especially that their cross-sectional data was collected in 1993, and they expressed the necessity to have a more recent research that could examine the association among racial-ethnic identity content and process, teacher-based discrimination, academic self-efficacy, and academic performance of students.

As also observed on the previous studies, they focused more on the effect oppressive practices on students' academic performance and critical engagement of students, but not enough attention has been given to the results on students' behaviour in terms of physical, emotional, and psychological health (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, as cited in Peng & Huang, 2024).

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Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the common disempowering practices among teachers, their effects to the students' academic performance and emotional well-being, and the suggestions to mitigate disempowering practice. This study will benefit the students, teachers, the school administration, the stakeholders, and the school as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on exploring the common disempowering practices among teachers, their effects to the students' academic performance and emotional well-being, and the suggestions to mitigate disempowering practice.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the common disempowering practices in school?
2. What are the effects of disempowering practices to the students' academic performance and emotional well-being?
3. What are the suggestions to mitigate disempowering practices?

The Self-Determination Theory

This study adheres with the Self-determination Theory of Ryan and Deci (2000) as cited in Ryan and Deci (2017) who tackles about human personality and motivation in relation to the social surroundings. According to this theory, individuals have three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness or connection, and autonomy that are for their functioning, well-being, and motivation

In the educational setting, the theory suggests that these needs are significantly influenced by the teachers' behaviors and practices. When teachers engage supportive practices, such as giving students various options, letting them voice out their opinions and giving them constructive feedbacks, students are satisfied with their basic psychological needs. These results to them feel confident, connected with others, and have control of their own learning. On the other hand, if teachers engage in controlling and disempowering practices, such as excessive punishments, being authoritative, and ignoring students' effort, the students will be frustrated and can't achieve their basic psychological needs. This frustration they feel may lead to decrease of motivation, academic engagement, and negative emotional and psychological impacts. As what Jang et al. (2016) emphasized, supportive practices of teachers that satisfy students' needs can raise their engagement, while teachers' controlling practices that frustrate their needs can disengage them.

Thus, Self-Determination Theory offers this study a view on how critical the role of teachers in shaping students' educational outcomes. This will help the study explore how teachers' disempowering practices in school setting affect students' academic performance and emotional well-being, and what behaviors may hinder students' motivation and development. This will also guide the study to investigate the strategies that could mitigate disempowering practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part of the study emphasizes that disempowering practices in schools are grounded in the teaching strategies that undermine students. Those strategies limit students' ability to participate and decide for themselves, or it may not simply take the power of students, but may slowly reduce them overtime. And, these practices often take the form of rigid rules and controlling behaviors. Teachers may threaten students about deadlines and absences, reject their creative inputs, give destructive criticisms, or impose strict behavioural expectations.

These practices strip students of ownership of their learning and reduce their curiosity that leads to them doing their work just for compliance. The impacts are not only on their academic performance, but also on their emotional well-being. The disempowering practices frustrate students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, connection, and competence, leading to reduced motivation, disengagement, anger, anxiety, and even depression. These effects create dependence rather than independence of students to their own learning.

Despite these negative impacts, many scholars argue that disempowering practices can be reversed by shifting toward empowering practices. It is suggested that rather than control, teachers should adopt students' perspectives, nurture intrinsic motivation, and communicate using encouraging language. Teachers must also seek for professional development to learn restorative and equitable classroom practices to create a responsive and inclusive teaching and learning environment. If the approaches are done properly, teachers could move beyond avoiding harm, and instead foster a climate where students feel valued, competent, and able to manage their own learning and growth.

A. Understanding Disempowering Practices

In every learning environment, the teacher's approach can either build students up or slowly chip away at their sense of agency. Madsen (1999), as cited in Madsen (2005) defines disempowering practices as ways of thinking, attitudes, and actions that involve undermining, limiting, and taking over other individual's ability to participate and make decisions for them. On the same sense, Ryan & Deci (2017), Ames (1992), Duda & Appleton (2016), as cited in Lopez-Garcia et al. (2023) described disempowering climate as having a greater ego-involving that focuses on criticizing students' mistakes and rewarding the most competent, and

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controlling style that establishes ways of thinking, acting, and behaving that are imposed by teacher, independent of students' interests.

Such disempowering practices and climates not merely take power away, because according to Overton (2009) as cited in Stylianou and Zembylas (2020), it erodes power through certain events, actions, and behaviors. In other words, it is the individual's loss of ability to create influence and decide for him or be independent. It is not just an absence of power, but rather a process in which power is being eroded overtime caused by repeated experiences of being subjected to rigid rules and exclusion in decision making.

B. Patterns of Disempowerment in School Environment

The classroom is often where these practices are most visible. According to Duda et al. (2016) and Haerens et al. (2016) as cited in Lopez-Garcia et al. (2023), various teacher behaviors contribute to disempowering climate.

One of those is threatening students about deadlines and absences. For instance, those who exceed the minimum number of absences could not take their exams. Another is setting rules on how students should behave in class, such as, telling them not to leave the classroom until explanation has been given. Also, giving negative comments or destructive criticisms like telling students that they won't be doing well in their future professions. And, rejecting students' creative opinions and suggestions. For examples, giving a specific format and characteristics on what their output should look like. Lastly, using controlling and strict instructions that leave students with no choice, like telling students that they could not take the exam without submitting their tasks.

When these patterns become part of the school culture, they do more than enforce discipline; they strip students of ownership over their learning, replacing curiosity and initiative with compliance and passivity.

C. Impacts on Students' Learning and Well-being

The consequences of disempowering practices are far-reaching. Teachers' disempowering practices may affect students' engagement and motivation to learn. Ryan & Deci (2020) emphasized that disempowering practices may frustrate students' basic psychological needs, such as autonomy, connection, and competence, which are essential for intrinsic motivation and effective learning. Assor et al. (2005) added that the teachers' controlling behaviors directed to students could arouse students' anger and anxiety that causes students to feel undermined and restricted to actively engage academically.

This lack of empowerment not only limits learning, it also affects students' personal development. Dymond (2018) warns that the students compliance do not actually empower them, instead, they disempowered by those punishment and their school experiences that lead to failing to develop their ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. The controlling behaviors of the teachers were compared by Walker (2008) to an authoritarian parenting style. It was found that students who experienced an authoritarian parenting style wherein they are managed with limited autonomy support are more disengaged and have limited ability belief to their selves. These adult practices that uses authoritarian structures were believed to be the only way to maintain order, but these practices only create students who are dependent of the adults for then to act appropriately, and they don't have the ability to manage their own behavior (Dymond, 2018). Assor et al. (2005) emphasized that these disempowering and oppressive practices can contribute to the feeling of anxiety and anger, as well as to depression and stress because of the experiences of humiliation and shaming.

D. Moving Toward Empowering Practices

While disempowering practices are damaging, they are not irreversible. Reeve (2009) acknowledged the paradoxical situation that the teachers engage in controlling behaviors because they also value and support students' autonomy. To remedy the paradox, he outlines three tasks to shift teachers' behaviour from control to support. These are – seeing situations from students' point of view, nurture students' intrinsic motivation like curiosity, interests, values, and personal goals, and communicating with students using non-controlling but encouraging language.

Similarly, according to Gregory and Fergus (2017), students' feeling of alienation is reduced and their engagement increases when the teacher becomes culturally responsive and create inclusive classroom. And in order to achieve the culturally responsive classroom, Dagadu (2025) recommends to expand teachers' professional development opportunities, and their trainings should focus on the culturally responsive pedagogy, restorative discipline techniques, implicit bias and equity in education, and practical classroom application of Culturally Response Classroom Management.

When educators adopt these approaches, they not only avoid the pitfalls of disempowerment but actively foster a classroom climate where students feel valued, capable, and in control of their own learning journey.)

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative design, which aimed to provide a clear and detailed account of real-life experiences in natural settings. As Magilvy and Thomas (2009) explained, qualitative research explores lived experiences to gain deep understanding of a phenomenon. The researchers served as the main instrument, using methods like interviews and observations (Bhattacharjee,

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2012 as cited in Jabor, 2024) to gather data. This design emphasized open-ended inquiry and aimed to minimize researcher bias. This study employed this design to explore teachers and students' experiences of disempowering practices in the classroom setting. The data were gathered through interviews.

A. Context

The study was conducted in a public and private secondary institution in the Philippines. The public secondary institution, located in the province, offers both Junior and Senior High School, each with over 15 sections per grade level, while the private institution, located in the city, offers various tracks and strands for senior high school with more than 250 student population. The public and private schools' size, diversity, and setting make it a suitable site for the research, as it represents many of the common issues found within the broader education system. They cater to students from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, providing valuable insights into teacher-student dynamics and classroom experiences. With the study being conducted in the environment, allowed the researchers to explore real-life student experiences and develop meaningful recommendations that can contribute to improvements both within the school and in other similar educational contexts.

B. Participants

Six teachers and six students from a public and a private educational institution were the participants of this study. The researchers secured the necessary letters to conduct study approved by the Schools Division Superintendent, and the school principals. The participants also signed an informed consent and were informed that their participation in voluntary. The group is diverse as it includes teachers from different grade level and ages. To keep the confidentiality, pseudonyms were used as names of the participants.

C. Data and Measures

The data were gathered through an interview. Before the interview started, researchers introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the interview, and assured the participants that their answers will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Then, the interview began with the researchers asking engagement questions to the participants to make them at ease. They proceeded with asking exploratory open-ended questions necessary for the research study. To elicit more information from the participants, the researchers also asked follow-up questions. Before ending the interview, the participants were asked about their over-all experience in their school. The interview was also audio-recorded with the permission from the participants.

D. Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure used in the study is thematic analysis. According to Niland et al., (2014), as cited in Terry et al., (2017), thematic analysis can be used to analyse data from "traditional" face-to-face data collection methods like interview. The researchers utilized the data analysis procedure using thematic analysis from Creswell's Framework for Analyzing Qualitative Data. The researchers started with the transcription of interviews in verbatim while listening to the audio recordings. Next, they generated initial codes and highlight recurring words, phrases, or ideas. Then, they searched for themes through grouping similar codes together. After that, they reviewed and refined themes by checking what to combine, split, or discard. Thereafter, they defined themes based on how they relate to the research questions and named them meaningfully. Lastly, the researchers wrote the report by presenting themes with supporting quotes from the interview and explain how each theme addresses the research objectives.

IV. RESULTS

The findings were drawn from the participants' insights shared during the interview. To support these results, the researchers also included direct statements from both students and teachers.

Disempowering practices: Unseen rules that restricts students

Students considered various school rules and teachers' behaviors as disempowering, such as restrictive communication rules, imposing rigid and appearance-related rules, and shaming and humiliation. For instance, Amari said that "I find 'no talking policy' disempowering because I can see that some students who cannot understand the lesson clearly cannot ask their classmates for clarifications and are too shy to ask their teacher. On the other hand, the haircut policy is somehow disempowering too." In the same way, Kat stressed the struggle of shy learners who depend on peer interaction to learn and understand their lessons, saying, "Talking with my seatmate/classmate, as a shy student asking my teacher can be sometimes hard. Therefore, discussing these questions and topic to someone who is at my level is more convenient."

Other students also mentioned that they have experienced punitive measures and public embarrassment from their teachers. Mill shared that "Every late and absences have a corresponding minus points," while Karsen pointed out the discouraging effects of humiliation, explaining, "Calling out those students who got low scores during quizzes and incorporating negative jokes are what I find disempowering." Similarly, appearance rules emerged as restrictive, with Zoey simply mentioning, "Rules about hair or haircuts." Finally, Leon highlighted that excessive personal criticisms are damaging, saying, "Teachers who often

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comment/excessively criticize their student's life—things that are completely out of topic in terms of educational aspect—can come out as offensive and rude. It can seriously hurt the student's feelings.”

Teachers also recognized the disempowering practices in schools, reflecting their own rules and behaviors or rules and behaviors that they have observed that may unintentionally limit students' confidence and learning. Teacher Bianca admitted that verbal insults and harsh questioning can be harmful, explaining that “In a way of uttering hurtful words. Example: ‘Ogre, aren't you ashamed? You're so stupid, I'll smash your head now.’ Sometimes, the sudden questioning by the teacher that the student cannot answer can cause trauma or embarrassment to the student.”

Likewise, Teacher Sam reflected how classroom noise rules may backfire, stating, “The one that can most easily become disempowering is the distinction between academic and unacademic noise.” While, Teacher Marian pointed out that some of her own practices, such as cellphone collection and delayed questioning may restrict students, saying, “Before we start, they either surrender their phones on my table or keep them in their bags... Lastly, I sometimes ask them to save their questions for the end to maintain a smooth flow of discussion.”

Appearance-related and disciplinary rules are also highlighted. Teacher Juancho criticized the haircut and dress code rules as “outdated due to the fact that students cannot express themselves especially on crossdressing or showing their gender identity.” On the other hand, Teacher Lea enumerated practices such as “seating arrangement... requiring students to memorize the school's mission, vision, and specific goals... [and] requiring students to have a proper haircut.” Finally, Teacher Kath acknowledge that technology restrictions, particularly the “No Cellphone Policy,” can be disempowering “because students get distracted thinking that they might miss important calls or messages.”

Both students and teachers recognized that some rules and practices in school can be disempowering, often limiting confidence, participation, and self-expression. Students highlighted restrictive communication rules like the “no talking policy”, appearance-related regulations such as haircut rules, punitive grading, and experiences of public shaming and excessive criticism as some those disempowering practices. These practices were seen as discouraging, particularly for shy learners who rely on peer support, and harmful to students' emotional well-being. Similarly, teachers admitted or observed that some rules and practices, such as harsh language, rigid discipline, seating arrangements, noise and cellphone restrictions, and appearance-related rules, may restrict learning, self-expression, and comfort in the classroom. Overall, both perspectives reveal that disempowering practices in schools negatively affect student engagement, self-esteem, and academic growth.

Reduced motivation and declined academic performance: The impacts of disempowering practices

Several students linked disempowering practices to academic struggles, especially in terms of motivation, participation, and performance. Amari explained that “The impacts of ‘No talking policy’ effects on the students' academic performance are enough to make the students feel helpless and have unheard and unanswered questions in their mind. However, the ‘haircut policy’ can affect the academic performance of the students by decreasing their confidence that stops them from reciting in front of others. This impact could bring down their grades due to poor interaction and communication with their fellow classmates and their teachers.” Similarly, Kat admitted that “These practices may lessen our understanding and comprehensions as student towards our lessons and eventually lower our academic performance.” Karsen also shared, “Instead of being motivated, those disempowering practices led them to further neglect their studies. Hearing those words affects their self-esteem—making it difficult for them to focus on improving their performance.”

And, rules on appearance were also connected to academic decline, according Zoey, “Hair can be a form of someone's support, therefore, if a child is forced to have a standard haircut when they are more comfortable in long hair, they are not able to perform well because of uneasiness.” Likewise, Leon argued that “These disempowering practices can cause the students to lose focus and motivation. These absences and loss of focus will be the cause of decline in the student's grades.”

Teachers also observed that disempowering practices often lower students' participation and grades. Teacher Bianca stated that the students “experience trauma within themselves, feeling ashamed to answer the teacher's questions. This can lead to low scores that affect their marks or grades.” While Teacher Sam highlighted how strict communication rules hinder students' academic growth, saying, “Rigidly enforcing a distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘unacademic’ noise can really backfire on students' academic performance, even though it's meant to help... Some students need to talk through a problem or whisper a question to a classmate to really get it, and if I label that as a distraction, they might stop participating altogether. This can cause anxiety, make them afraid to ask for help, and ultimately hurt their focus and ability to remember information. It also prevents them from developing important social skills, like working with others.” Teacher Marian also explained the mixed effects of discipline, as such, “In terms of academic performance, some students excel because of the discipline imposed on them. However, not all students learn at the same pace, and some may feel overwhelmed trying to balance learning with strictly following rules, which can affect their scores and overall performance.”

Other rules were also linked to the reduced academic success of students. Teacher Lea noted that the students' “Seating arrangement can be disempowering because sometimes there are students who are not comfortable to sit in front or at the back of the classroom. Some may struggle to see the visual aids on the board; others may get distracted and miss instructions. As a result,

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it reduces their performance in the activities, quizzes, and even exams.” She also added, “Instead of learning subject-related content, they spend time in memorizing the mission, vision, and specific goals of the school, which are not part of the MELCS. As a result, this may lead to the decline of students’ performance.” Finally, Teacher Kath explained how banning phones during class takes away the chance to use tools for learning, as she stated, “The policy deprive students of a chance to integrate the use of technology or cellphones in their learning such as using it for quick research, calculators, or dictionaries.”

Both students and teachers revealed that disempowering practices can contribute to students’ academic struggles by reducing their motivation, participation, and overall performance. Students emphasized how restrictive rules like the “no talking policy,” haircut regulations, punitive measures, and harsh criticisms lead to loss of their confidence, poor comprehension, neglect of studies, and declining grades. Teachers likewise observed that practices such as verbal insults, rigid communication rules, seating arrangements, memorization tasks, and cellphone restrictions often discourage participation, limit understanding, and hinder the development of essential skills. While some disciplinary measures may benefit a few learners, the overall effect of these practices is a decline in students’ academic engagement and achievement.

Fear, anxiety, and loss of self-esteem: The emotional toll of disempowering practices

Students strongly expressed the emotional toll disempowering practices have caused. Amari described this by saying that “The mental impact of ‘No talking policy’ is having an anxiety whenever they seek help in understanding the lesson from their classmates because they’re scared that the teacher calls them out for learning while the ‘haircut policy’ lowers down their self-esteem that increase their insecurities or lead them to isolating because they cannot express themselves.” Kat recounted her painful personal experience, “As someone, who was once criticized by a teacher for being noisy, I felt embarrassed and now too tamed and traumatized to even ask anything during discussions. And so now, I tend not to ask anything I don’t understand and just do self-learning as I go home.”

Mill stressed how overwhelming it is when they are being pressured by their teachers, sharing, “Because life is not easy, we do not know what happening in one’s life. Not all students have a balance life. Some of them are working part time just to make ends meet. They are going to be conscious of how well they are performing at school and are being overwhelm with a lot of problem and worst case scenario self-harm. The impact are mental breakdown, existential crisis, question everything there were hard for, mostly their mental well-being.” Karsen also revealed how harsh words add to students’ struggles, sharing that because of the disempowering practices, students “Not only do they neglect their studies, it also affects their emotional well-being. It affects their confidence, the way they look at themselves, and they would often develop vices in order to block out the negativity. Encountering those practices distracts them from their classes and discussions—instead of focusing on their lessons, they overthink about the things that they did in order to receive those negative comments.”

Lastly, Leon summed up the emotional burden disempowering practices caused, stating that “These disempowering practices can cause stress and lower their self-esteem. In learning, these practices reduce motivation, discourage participation, and create fear of making mistakes, leading to surface-level understanding instead of deeper learning. Over time, students may develop negative attitudes toward school, lose curiosity, and struggle to build confidence and independence in their academic journey.”

Teachers also recognized the emotional toll of disempowering practices to students. Teacher Bianca stated that students “develop negative thinking, loss of self-confidence, or shyness. Fear of answering questions is accompanied by anxiety. There is a lack of motivation or interest in their studies and learning. They feel fear or trauma from such experiences.” Teacher Sam reflected on noise policies, saying, “When I strictly label a student’s natural chatter as ‘unacademic noise,’ it can really impact their emotional well-being. It sends a message that their way of thinking or collaborating is wrong, which can create a lot of anxiety and frustration. Students might start to feel self-conscious and afraid to participate; worried they’ll be corrected or judged. This can hurt their confidence and lead to a sense of isolation, making them feels like an outsider in their own classroom community.” Teacher Marian also noted the emotional strain that disempowering practices may cause, sharing, “I believe that if such a practice is not communicated well to students, it can make them feel uncomfortable or anxious about participating in class discussions. That’s why it’s important for teachers to clearly explain the rules, so they don’t come across as intimidating or overly authoritative.”

Moreover, appearance rules were also considered as harm to students’ emotional well-being. Teacher Juancho explained that “The dress code and haircut policy reduce the motivation of students to attend and learn since they feel that they do not feel accepted by the institution. This lack of inclusivity can cause separation, anxiety and depression to students.” Similarly, Teacher Lea supports his statement by describing that “Requiring proper haircut restricts self-expression... It can also reduce their focus on learning as attention shifts to meeting the appearance standards rather than academic goals. The overemphasis on the appearance such as proper haircut may make some students feel undervalued and disconnected from the school if their personal style is not accepted.” And, Teacher Kath explained how the collection of cellphones may affect students emotionally by saying that “It could also make the students feel that their teacher do not trust them, and may lower their motivation and make them frustrated.”

Both students and teachers emphasized that disempowering practices have negative effects on students’ emotional well-being, often leads to anxiety, loss of confidence, and reduced motivation. Students shared that restrictive rules such as the “no talking

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policy” and haircut regulations heightened their insecurities, caused their isolation, and led them to feelings of embarrassment, trauma, or even self-harm. Their experiences of harsh criticisms and public humiliation lead to overthinking, stress, lowered self-esteem, and surface-level learning instead of meaningful engagement. Similarly, teachers acknowledged that practices such as verbal insults, strict noise policies, appearance rules, and cellphone restrictions may trigger students' fear, frustration, anxiety, and disconnection from school. Overall, both perspectives highlight that the practices undermine students' emotional well-being, discouraging participation and fostering negative attitudes toward learning.

Building positive learning environments: Recommendations to mitigate disempowering practices

Students provided insightful recommendations on how school practices could be improved. Amari recommended the moderation in rules, explaining, “I suggest to let the students discuss or ask their classmates quietly, and the volume or one's voice should not distract or disrupt the teachers' discussion because I think the ‘no talking policy’ should only be done during assessments or exams. Moreover, I understand that the ‘haircut policy’ is part of the students' discipline, but I also think that everyone should have the freedom to express themselves, so I suggest that there should be no ‘haircut policy’ but a ‘clean haircut’ policy.”

Kat called for more freedom and support for students, suggesting to “Letting the students to move and speak more freely and comfortably, creating a space to grow and learn and not to [destroy] their confidence and creativity. For each student have different ways in learning and it is a teacher's duty to aid them explores in order to learn and build a stronger community.” Mill emphasized fairness in attendance policies, sharing, “I suggest to stop these practices or ask them why they are late or absent and if it is a reasonable cause no minus point shall be given.” Similarly, Karsen stressed the value of constructive teaching, stating that “Instead of calling out the students' incapacibilities, they should focus on the things that they can improve—allowing them to adjust, focus on themselves, and change for the better. On the other hand, in order to make the class ‘fun,’ they should incorporate interactive activities to enable learning and amusement.”

Concerns about appearance rules were also raised, with Zoey suggesting, “Even though it is understandable that the school wanted to make the students more presentable therefore they implement such rule. Maybe it would be better if the students will perform in their most comfortable ways. The school can just advise the students to have tidy hairstyles.” Lastly, Leon recommended that “teachers should stop commenting/criticising about the student's personal life, especially the things that are not affected by their education.”

Teachers also offered thoughtful recommendations to reduce disempowering practices. Teacher Bianca stressed about sensitivity in communication, stating, “Be meticulous or choose carefully the words to be directed at the students. Do not be carried away by an outburst of emotions that may result in anger leading to hurtful words being spoken. This is known as anger management.”

In addition, Teacher Sam emphasized shifting toward empathy, suggesting, “To lessen disempowering practices, I believe the most important step is to shift our mind-set from enforcing rigid rules to building a supportive and trusting environment... By focusing on empathy and open communication, we can create practices that feel empowering because they're based on mutual respect, helping every student feel seen and valued in our classroom.”

Moreover, Teacher Marian suggested an institutional action, sharing, “My suggestion to lessen disempowering practices in school is for the administration to hold more frequent meetings or seminars that address not only students' well-being but also that of teachers. These sessions should also serve as opportunities to regularly evaluate teaching skills and the effectiveness of learning delivery.” While, Teacher Juancho focused on fairness, saying, “I suggest that the school should avoid double standards, instead set guidelines that apply equally to all students, regardless of gender. Instead of requiring students to have one-style haircut, it is better to emphasize cleanliness and proper grooming to them.”

Teacher Lea also proposed flexibility on rules, suggesting, “Allow personal expressions like flexible haircut policies and seating arrangements. Not requiring students to memorize or include the VMOs in exams. Instead, the teacher can just incorporate the statements through reflections or class discussions.” And, Teacher Kath highlighted technology integration, recommending that “instead of collecting the students' cellphones during classes to avoid cheating and use of AI, we, teachers, could just teach them the responsible use of it for learning.”

Both students and teachers recommended for changes in order to reduce the negative effects of disempowering practices. Students highlighted the need for more modern and flexible rules, such as allowing quiet peer discussions, changing haircut policies into clean and tidy guidelines, and removing unfair attendance penalties. They also stressed that supportive teaching like focusing on students' strengths, integrating interactive activities, respecting personal boundaries, and creating a freer and more comfortable learning environment are important. Teachers, on the other hand, emphasized empathy, sensitivity, and institutional support. They suggested mindful communication to avoid hurtful remarks, fostering trust and respect instead of rigid control, and conducting regular seminars to evaluate teaching effectiveness. Teachers also recommended fairness and inclusivity in rules, flexible approaches to appearance and classroom arrangements, and the responsible integration of technology in learning. Together, these insights point to the need for a balanced, respectful, and student-centered approach to school practices.

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V. DISCUSSION

Resonating strongly with Madsen's (1999), as cited in Madsen (2005) definition of disempowering practices as actions that limit anyone's participation and decision making, the study highlights various practices identified by both students and teachers as disempowering. These include restrictive communication rules, appearance-related regulations, public shaming, no cellphone policy, seating arrangements, and unfair grading. Such practices were found to reduce motivation, decline academic performance, and negatively impact students' emotional well-being, resulting to anxiety, trauma, loss of self-esteem, and feelings of isolation. These findings align with Freire's (2020) notion of traditional banking approaches in education, where in students are treated as passive recipients of knowledge and unable to participate and think critically. For instance, the students' experience with the "no talking policy" forced them to be silent and prevent them to interact that stifle their ability to seek help and collaborate, which also reflects Ryan and Deci's (2020) claim that when fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are restricted, intrinsic motivation also declines.

The study also found that appearance-related rules, such as strict dress codes and haircut policies, can lower the students' self-esteem and motivation to attend their classes. These findings support the observation of Walker (2008), wherein he compared authoritarian teaching with authoritarian parenting styles, which both restrict autonomy that leads to disengagement. Additionally, Teacher Juancho's statement that outdated dress code results to students feeling unaccepted related to Kyere et al.'s (2023) discussion on the intersexuality of discrimination in school setting, where gender and socio-economic status are viewed as factors to teacher-based biases.

Furthermore, the interview findings, found that students were traumatized on their teachers' public shaming, insults, and excessive criticism, which causes to a decline in their confidence and negative effects on their learning outcomes. The students' experience of being called out for getting low scores shows that Dymond (2018) is correct for his warning that students compliance do not actually empower them, instead, they disempowered by those punishment and their school experiences that lead to failing to develop their ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically.

The combined impact of these practices is a decrease on students' academic engagement, as students reported that they tend to rely on surface-level learning because they loss motivation. The students' observation that fear of criticism from the teachers forces students to memorize rather than understanding deeper reinforces Wenner and Campbell's (2017), as cited in Peng & Huang (2024) argument that overly strict management suppresses students' academic growth.

Despite the challenges, students and teachers have several suggestions for improvement highlighting fairness, empathy, and open communication, as well as opportunities for self-expression, training, and respecting boundaries. These suggestions support the assertion of Reeve (2009) that teacher may shift from controlling to supportive behaviors by seeing situations from the students' point of view, nurturing intrinsic motivation and using non-controlling but encouraging language. Likewise, Zoey's suggestion to allow flexibility in hairstyles and Teacher Lea's call for less rigid seating arrangements aligns with Gregory and Fergus' (2017) argument that culturally responsive classrooms foster inclusion and engagement.

VI. CONCLUSION

Both students and teachers recognize various school and classroom practices as disempowering which include restrictive communication rules such as the "no talking policy," appearance-related regulations like the haircut and dress codes, public shaming and excessive criticisms, no cellphone policy, seating arrangements, and unfair grading penalties. While these practices are intended to instill discipline, they instead restrict students' autonomy, self-expression, and participation. As a result, the students feel silenced, controlled, and disconnected from their learning which creates a disempowering climate.

Disempowering practices were found to negatively affect both students' academic performance and emotional well-being. Academically, students reportedly experienced reduce in motivation, neglect of their studies, and a decline in comprehension and participation. Many also resorted to surface-level learning strategies, such as rote memorization, rather than engaging in meaningful understanding, which ultimately weakened their overall learning outcomes. Emotionally, students experienced heightened feelings of anxiety, trauma, low self-esteem and confidence, isolation and disconnection. Some even resorted to negative behaviors like unhealthy coping mechanisms and develop vices.

Moving from control towards empowerment it is highlighted that open communication, empathy, fairness, and opportunities for self-expression, training, and respecting boundaries are essential to mitigate disempowering practices. Some of the suggestions from students and teachers are creating the rules on appearance and seating arrangements flexible, teaching students the responsible use of cellphones instead of confiscation, avoiding humiliation through careful choice of words, and holding teachers' seminars and trainings on inclusive, cultural-responsive, and supportive practices. These strategies when adapted will not only improve students' academic performance but also nurture students' confidence and motivation to learn.

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