

Empowering and Fostering the ESL Teachers of a Private English Language Institute in the Philippines: A Case Study

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Abstract

Employee empowerment is essential for any organization or company. For any organization to flourish and be at par with others, leaders or managers must strive harder to encourage and motivate and empower employees or faculty. Empowerment is the main target for success; each member of an organization or company can produce great materials, resources, and learning tools, clear vision and mission, goals, and objectives. Empowerment is a process that continues. Bandura's Social Cognitive theory and self-determination theory contribute to employee or faculty empowerment and aid in determining the choice of task and fostering positive attitudes. The faculty will feel free and possess the competence to resolve problems and contribute their ideas to the success of an organization. This study aimed to determine how administrators foster and empower teachers at an English language institute. This study used a qualitative research design (case study) approach. Interviews, observations, document analysis, and other documents that may be required for the research design were used. The participants were English as a Second language (ESL) teachers from a selected private English Language Institute in the Philippines. This study will benefit the leaders and faculty of an educational institution.

Keywords: Empowerment, Teacher Empowerment, learning materials and resources, Self-Determination

Introduction

The empowerment of teachers generally rests on the hands of school administrators, and empowerment provides good autonomy if employees are empowered. Empowerment is known to increase a person's motivation and enhance feelings and commitment to tasks (Newstrom & Davis, 2002). In the 21st century, faculty empowerment is a major aspect of every institution or organization that desires to attain higher worker participation, pliability, and satisfaction (Newstrom & Davis, 2002).

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Faculty empowerment is essential to the progress of an institution or organization. The faculty should be given the authority to have input and power over their tasks and the potential to share suggestions and opinions within the organization. When the faculty are empowered, they are loyal, confident, and dedicated to the success of the institution. Empowered faculty feel free to embrace change and to proceed from the current situation to the high level of success (Aryee, Walumbwa, Seidu & Otaye, 2016; Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen & Rosen, 2007; Mathieu, Gilson & Ruddy, 2006). As a result, administrators learn and grow as well as teachers.

Review of Related Literature

History of empowerment: Field of business (Patrick & Laschinger, 2006 as cited by Kanter, 1977). Later, the social sciences tied the theory and adapted it to their fields. Empowerment is also embedded in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive and self-determination theories (Bandura, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Individuals believe that they can do something if they are empowered and can withstand complexities (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006). The other aspects of empowerment—empowerment growth, empowerment effectiveness, empowerment structures, empowerment attributes, accountability, pros and cons, faculty empowerment (elements within), the significance of faculty empowerment, faculty empowerment, and student achievement—are embedded within empowerment (Burke, 1986; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2012; Fry, 2003; Klagge, 1995; Maynard et al., 2014; Petter & Peterson, 2014).

Teacher empowerment is one of the aspects of energizing skills, resources, power, privileges, and motivation. Studies have been conducted on empowering faculty in training programs for collaborative work, supervisors' roles, and increasing teacher responsibility to tasks (Lee & Nie, 2003; Niemted, 2016; Nomass, 2013; Voegtlin, Boehm, & Bruch, 2015). Teacher empowerment boosts teachers' caliber and creativity.

Research Gap

Studies are yet to delve into the choice of program models and exposure to new instructional practices. This is the population gap and evidence gap in the literature that has yet to be mentioned (Miles, 2017). Empowerment is essential in these two aspects. The main goal of the case study was to conduct an in-depth study of the case and understand the participants' perspectives. The researcher explored and understood the participants' natural settings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Philosophical Position

Social Constructivism, Hermeneutics and Interpretivism permeate this research design. Theories related to empowerment include Self-determination and the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2008). These theories support this study.

Biblical Perspective

“So, if there is any hope in Christ, any consolation in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any tenderness and sympathy, then complete my joy by sharing the same love, having the same perspective, and being fully in agreement with one another. Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit; rather, act with humility by considering others to be more important

than oneself. Each should consider both his or her own interests and those of others. Philippians 2:1-4. God encourages every being created to grow. Administrators are to do the same as their teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment is embedded in Bandura's Social Cognitive and self-determination theories (Bandura 2001; Deci & Ryan 2008). The self-efficacy theory encourages people to work on shared beliefs, capabilities, and aspirations. The theory offers methods for enhancing psychological well-being, emotional development, cognitive development, or motivational processes; enhancing behavioral competencies; or changing the social context in which individuals live and work. (Bandura, 2001). Self-determination theory distinguishes between controlled and autonomous motivation. Self-determination theory motivates people to act and energize their behavior. People behave willingly when they are motivated autonomously. (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Stone, Deci & Ryan, 2009).

This study aims to highlight the leadership role, challenges, and level of empowerment of teachers at this private English language institute in the Philippines. This study addressed three research questions. These questions are:

1. What level of empowerment do English language teachers feel in language centers?
2. What challenges contribute to teacher empowerment in English language centers?
3. What is the role of the administrators in teacher empowerment?

Having seen the complications faced by teachers in teaching English as a second language, the researcher wanted to see how teachers are empowered with regard to teaching. In addition, the researcher aimed to determine the role of management in empowering language teachers. Finally, how does empowerment contribute to the English Language?

Methodology

A qualitative study provides a more detailed explanation of people's experiences, whether it is a phenomenon. Hence, for this study, the researchers chose a qualitative study to obtain the depth of any experience that an individual may go through. Qualitative research provides a deeper comprehension and permits researchers to dig deeply into the problem (Silver, 2000). I, the researcher, was not a Filipino; however, the coordinator helped me in the study. She was able to obtain participants for the study.

Research Design

This research was a case study in a natural setting. Case studies aid researchers in knowing and learning about the uniqueness of groups of people who have experienced the same phenomenon in a cultural setup (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). A case study is a comprehensive investigation that examines modern phenomena in the natural environment. A program, an event, an activity, an issue, or an individual are only a few possible manifestations of the phenomena. The natural setting is the background in which this phenomenon occurs. The case in this study is the empowerment of teachers, and the bounded system includes teachers, the facilities, and the resources of this particular

language center. What is practical or relevant is a certain range. Boundaries were established for events, processes, times, and locations. This is a particular Adventist Language Center in Cavite, Philippines.

The philosophical underpinnings of the study are Social Constructivism and Interpretivism, which commonly permeate case study research design. The researcher sought to explore and understand the participants in their natural settings. This case study was conducted to elucidate the experiences of individuals who shared some unique experiences. Creswell (2008) espouses the culture and how behavior, beliefs, and values of language learning and teaching in society grow over time. This study aimed to identify how empowering language teachers can have an impact on culture and English.

Research Tools

The researcher used an inductive method for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The researcher took field notes, pictures, and a two-day brief observation as well as inclusive attention to the attitudes and behaviors of the individuals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. The researcher initially had to obtain a letter of permission from the concerned research advisor. The researcher prepared a letter of permission to enter the language center. The coordinator and office assistant provided directions, and the researcher met the teachers of the language center. The coordinator gave permission, and the research was conducted the next day.

The researcher started the data collection procedure with the help of a coordinator to obtain the participants. Then, notes were taken, and ideas were converted into themes. At the outset, participants were informed of their voluntary participation, and informed consent forms were given to them with their signatures. The interviews were brief and done in a simple manner for the comfort of the participants and the time for each interview was only 30-40 minutes and it was a three-day interview. Digital recorders were used for the interviews.

Description of the Setting

This case study was conducted to identify how teachers are empowered to teach language in the setting. The study was conducted at a single language center in Barangay II, Cavite. This Language center is under the leadership of a foreign pastor, a man who willingly signed and gave permission to conduct the study. The population of this language center is 30-40 students from different countries, and the ratio is equal for females and males. According to the coordinator, most teachers were Filipinos. This Christian Language Center is a residential community that includes individuals with different talents and hobbies. This language center does not have schools; however, it does have a church for students and teachers to worship. This language center has the reach of tricycles as a means of public transportation, whereas cars and motorcycles are private means of transportation. With regard to cleanliness, the location is clean and neatly maintained, and the area is quiet and has peace and order.

Description of the Participants

The participants came from different levels of experience within the language center. The table below describes everything about them. Table 1 below helps readers to understand the participants well. Most participants were young graduates who had

completed their undergraduate level at different universities. Some had teaching experiences for one to two years. Few had training in teaching English and then came to this language center to teach. All were Filipinos from different provinces of the Philippines. Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic Data of the Research Participants*

Participant	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age group	24	24	28	30	22	24	20	25
Level of education	BSN	Medical Technology	B.A. developmental communication	B.A. Secondary Education (English)	B.A. Hospital Mangt	B.A. Psy	B.A. Edu	BSBA
First language	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog
Spoken English	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Language at home	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog	Tagalog	Visayan	Tagalog
Interview setting	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library	Old Library
Socio-economic status	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle

The researcher used purposive sampling because the goal was to spade work with small groups to comprehend the phenomenon of the participants. In addition, this was done to create a close relationship with the participants and to understand the facts in depth (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Ten people were initially chosen, out of which eight participated in the study as they reached the saturation point. Five were males, and the other three were females from different education levels, age groups, and socioeconomic statuses. Table 1 describes the participants of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and recorded digitally. Before the interviews were conducted, I had to get a letter of permission from my advisor, send it to the director of the language center, and then give it to the language center coordinator to arrange the interviews. It took two days to obtain approval from management. I had to ask for the voluntary participation of the participants personally, and informed consent was given to them for agreement. The interviews lasted 30-40 minutes, and probing questions were asked. The interviews were conducted in English, as the teachers had command of the language. The observation was conducted prior to the interviews, which took two days. All observations were recorded as field notes.

Documents such as photographs, course outlines, activities, and other resources were part of the data collection. Documented photographs were interesting and coincided with what I needed to find. Member checks were performed to ensure the accuracy of findings.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data were then coded using the first cycle of coding given by Saldana and categorized according to their attributes, after which each group was labeled. As a researcher, I conjectured on the data. Codes and themes were generated from the data to answer the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained Ethical Review Board approval for safety as a researcher in order to adhere to ethical principles. Then I gave the participants an informed consent form while emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I also told them that their privacy would be maintained. The study subjects did not provide permission to use their names; thus, this was not permitted. From this point forward, I gave each participant a pseudonym.

Researchers' Reflexivity

As an English teacher, I saw the need for empowerment. Administrators are occasionally ignored because of their busyness. However, teachers need to help and support their teaching careers. I must state my position in the research to protect the validity of this study. (Merriam, 2009). As a second language teacher for over 13 years, I felt the need for teacher empowerment. The management was open to the study, and the director and coordinator had no other queries.

Results and Findings

The results and findings of this study are presented based on the individual research questions. The findings suggest the following. First, more training and seminars would be effective in enhancing language teaching. Second, qualified teachers with Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) training were successful in developing language teaching skills. Third, more team-building programs would boost and be an avenue for the empowerment of teachers and sharpening their skills. Finally, this research's results support previous studies findings that integrate employee empowerment within a workplace.

Research Question 1: What level of empowerment do English language teachers feel in language centers?

Using the transcripts of interviews, field notes from the observations, and my reflective journals, Research Question 1 revealed that the level of empowerment was through average knowledge enhancement, self-upgrading skills, availability of resources, and cordial collaboration.

Theme 1. Average knowledge enhancement

Knowledge enhancement is essential when teaching a second language and teachers must be equipped with more knowledge and skills. The teachers in this particular English language get lectures from experts outside the center, and if they have just joined teaching, senior teachers guide them. Based on the interviews and observations, the teachers were guided.

We have lectures from advisory professionals at least twice a year, although we need more (Participant 1).

Senior teachers teach us and give us lectures because we are new. (Participants 5 & 8)

Knowledge enhancement is an essential component in teaching a second language. Language teachers need knowledge enhancement as they impart learning to students (Evans, Hawksley, Holland, & Caillau, 2008). This would sharpen their skills, enlarge their mental territory, and be prepared to guide second language learners.

Theme 2. Self-upgrading Skills

Learning new skills is one of the best ways to grow, and it helps with adaptation as the field grows. Teachers and instructors should upgrade themselves if they seek new opportunities in the field. This would give benefits like building and increasing self-confidence... keeping up-to-date... with new teaching innovations... opening new doors... for new career achievements, and the ability to solve or resolve problems. Based on the interviews and observations, some participants expressed feelings about upgrading their skills.

I took TESOL training in my hometown before I could teach here” (Participant 2).

As a development communication student, I attend training seminars on my own. (Participant 3).

Teachers are considered to be the bedrock of the educational system, and they need to be upgraded (Chirimbu, Dejica-Carțiș, & Savu, 2014). By upgrading skills, language teachers can help second language students learn faster without much stress and create a fun learning environment. In the 21st century, new teaching strategies have emerged that would help teachers integrate fun learning activities.

Theme 3. Availability of Resources

Second-language teachers need resources to enhance their teaching and learning skills. Books and other materials help teachers teach and make learning more fun and meaningful. Based on observations, field notes, and interviews, resources play a significant role in second language teaching and learning. The participants revealed that resources and additional materials were added to teaching and learning.

The management provides books and other resources, audio and visual aids, and Internet facilities. (Participants 3, 5 & 8)

Teaching materials and resources can help and impact student learning. Teaching resources should be good and should ease students' learning journeys. This would help the students relax and have self-confidence in learning (Kumar, 2017; Pardo & Tellez Tellez, 2009).

Theme 4. Cordial Collaboration

Cordial collaboration is essential within the workplace and boosts an individual's working conditions. Second language teachers need to collaborate for growth and development. Collaboration should be conducted cordially to ensure a clear understanding of what needs to be done. Given this, teachers are a source of help and support in times of need, and cordial collaboration plays an important role. The interviews and observations revealed what is seen in cordial collaboration.

When I was in trouble, my colleagues and even the director and coordinator would come. (Participants 5 and 7).

They (colleagues) remind me of my abilities, and we cordially collaborate (Participants 3 and 4).

The 21st-century teachers are considered the object and subject of learning. Teachers must cooperate in developing themselves professionally, learning from each other reciprocally, and create a healthy and helpful learning atmosphere (Avalos, 2010; Fuolger, 2005; Miller & Burden, 2007; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi, 2016).

Research Question 2. What challenges contribute to teacher empowerment in English language centers?

The analysis of the data of this Research Question showed that there are challenges that contribute to teacher empowerment, and these challenges can be taken in a serious manner. The main themes were (a) tight schedules and time, (b) decision-making on student learning and conduct, and (c) class preparation. These themes had a significant impact on teacher empowerment and development.

Theme 1. Tight Schedules and Time

Teachers need time to rest and refresh their mental machines the next day. If they are loaded with tight schedules and prolonged timings, it would definitely slack their teaching ability, and their performance would run low. Most participants expressed concern over tight schedules and timings.

The schedule is tight, and we start our day at 9 in the morning and end by 5:30 in the evening, and then we need to have a staff meeting. (Participants 1 and 5). We hardly prepare during break time, as it is short. (Participant 4).

Extended learning time is beneficial for students (Joyner, 2012). It could be tedious for teachers as preparations are needed for the next day, and quality matters (Dorovolomo, Phan, & Maebuta, 2010). Teachers need some rest for a few hours, and night sleep is essential to rejuvenate the following day's work.

Theme 2. Decision-Making on Student Learning and Conduct

Every teacher is considered the captain of a class or leader and is given ample freedom to make decisions. With regard to teaching materials, teachers have the choice of what they can use and add to their teaching and learning. Second-language teachers should be given the freedom to choose and reprimand misbehavior within a classroom. Some participants expressed that they needed to follow the protocol, even if it was a simple problem.

“Of course, I had to follow the protocol, and the discipline is not with the teacher when students misbehave.” (Participant 3).

We are here to counsel the student, but the discipline is under the coordinator or director. (Participant 2)

Teachers consider and make judgments on content, instructional tactics, the use of instructional resources and technology, delivery methods, classroom management, and discipline, assessment of student learning, and a host of other related issues, even before instruction begins. (Fuller & Pearson, 2011).

Theme 2. Class Preparation

Second language teachers need ample time for preparation; however, if the teaching hours are long, there is a conflict between time management and preparing lessons for the class. Good lesson planning is an essential component of both teaching and learning. A well-prepared teacher always targets a successful instructional experience. Preparation includes interesting lessons and activities and takes a great deal of time and effort. In addition, if the teacher is new, they must be committed to spending the necessary time in this endeavor. Skills must be researched, structured, implemented, and constantly evaluated or revamped when necessary. Above all, consistency is an important tool for successful teaching. Most participants elucidated the prime importance of time for preparation.

Actually, I prepare at night from 10-12 and sometimes awake up to 1 a.m. (Participant 2).

At 10 pm, we get together in the staff room and prepare activities.” (Participant 5)

It could be tedious for teachers as preparations are needed for the next day, and quality matters (Dorovolomo, Phan, & Maebuta, 2010). This is evident from the observations of the first two days as well as the interviews. The teachers hardly get time to rest and relax from a day’s work.

Research Question 3. What is the role of the administration in teacher empowerment?

In a language center, the administrator plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers’ ability to instruct students in a second language. Second language instructors can find ways to lead and suit their talents and interests for the benefit of second language learners, thanks to their diverse administrative positions. Regardless of their role, teachers increase student learning, form the culture of their second language learners,

and have an impact on peer practice. This was evident from the responses of the participants in the interviews. Three themes emerged from the Research Question: psychological and physical support, mental wellness support, and Social Psychological support. Each of these themes impacts teachers' well-being.

Theme 1. Psychological and Physical Support

Psychological and physical support are capsules for strengthening the teaching environment for second language teachers. Encouraging words and empathy is essential, and that would help each individual do their best for the students. This can be seen through interviews and observations. The participants expressed gratitude for what their leaders had done.

Our director is very encouraging about all our needs. (Participant 3).

He treats us well. (Participant 5)

Employees feel capable and want to shape their work roles and situations, which is revealed by psychological empowerment, as opposed to a lifeless orientation to a work position. (Nel, Stander & Latif, 2015). This would increase the efficacy of the work and determination. In addition, it can help students achieve their learning goals.

Theme 2. Mental Wellness Support

It is crucial for leaders to preserve teachers' mental health, and it would be beneficial to have healthy workers. Additionally, teachers in good health are less likely to miss classes because of illness. A management that values its workers would encourage a healthy percentage of workers to show up to work each day, as healthy workers are less likely to miss work, lower presenteeism, and produce more work. Based on the interviews, field notes, and reflective journals, it was evident that the director did his part.

Our director provided mental support. (Participant 7)

He is supportive and understands what is needed. (Participant 4)

The way employees are treated by their leader and the behavior of the leaders in the organization makes an enormous difference in how they feel about themselves and their work (Donaldson-Feilder & Lewis, 2016; LaMontagne, Keegel, & Vallance, 2007). Mental wellness leads to productive labor and increases efficiency among teachers and instructors. Moreover, it enhances the vitality of work and energizes the teachers in the teaching environment.

Theme 3. Social Psychological Support

Social support is a key component for building strong relationships among leaders and employees, as is the case with the director and teachers of a language center. Social support is intertwined with employees' psychological health; when teachers face personal crises, the director attends to their immediate needs and spends time or has bonding time together. In addition, the director is the one who builds up his or her teachers in times of stress and implores people to lean on him or her for better comfort. The leader should be the individual who would take a day off, spend time with his or her teachers, refresh their

minds to reach their goal, and support them in various ways. Based on the interviews, field notes, and reflective journals, it is evident that the participants expressed their words of appraisal of their leader.

We have bonding and sharing with our management. (Participant 4)

We dinner together and share our ideas and opinions. (Participant 2)

Our director entertains us during our outings and tours. (Participant 1)

When employees are valued and cared for, there will be an exchange of rewards for them in various ways, such as salary increases, praise, and so on (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Employees feel a sense of satisfaction when they are recognized and appreciated. The social relationships between leaders and employees are essential.

Pedagogical Implications

A second language teacher must select effective strategies to tailor to the needs of second language learners. In this way, it would be helpful for students to express themselves politely in English. Second-language teachers can be informed about language assumptions regarding their strategies and activities.

There are a few guidelines that can help learners learn the language effectively in an interesting way and shape the sociolinguistic climate. Second language teachers can provide simulation activities for learners regarding lessons and activities. Second language teachers and directors are to be guided by updated program models and can choose which works best for them.

Additionally, Language center directors should be able to hire the most qualified language teachers or send teachers for training with regard to the four skills. Given this, exposure to new innovative teaching practices is essential for enhancing the learning environment of second-language students. Further research can be conducted using phenomenological studies on teacher empowerment. If sent to a similar setting, a Christian teacher should be humble, courteous, patient, and persevere in teaching L2 learners.

Conclusion

Empowerment plays a vital role in management or organization, and it lies solely in the hands of administrators. Administrators should be willing to help teachers grow professionally and, in doing so, boost motivation and commitment within teachers. With this in mind, teachers' efficacy and the productivity of their tasks would increase as well. Additionally, teachers would be ready to embrace change and complexities and battle the complications without a murmur, knowing they can fight and come out successfully.

Empowering teachers with freedom of choice without dictatorship boosts energy to combat problems with optimism. Empowerment provides autonomy within an organization. Exposure to innovative teaching practices is essential, as this would help students grow intellectually and professionally.

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About the Author:



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