Original Article

Humanistic Approaches in the Classroom: Exploring Teachers' Strategies on Students' Motivation and Academic Engagement

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Abstract. The humanistic approach is an educational strategy that focuses on entire growth, including emotional, moral, and cognitive development (Amini et al., 2025). Which foster respect, empathy, and personal growth, emphasizing the individual's overall development. This study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach and was conducted in three public schools in Davao del Sur, Philippines. The study's participants are six teachers with over 10 years of experience teaching in Davao del Sur public schools. The study comprises all teachers who have taught at levels 1–10. The questions are open-ended, allowing respondents to respond in their own words. The interview guide was developed through study and validated by the researcher's adviser. Braun and Clarke's theme analysis was the primary research analytic method employed. The following aims guide this study: (1) to determine how these methods affect student motivation and engagement, and (2) to give recommendations on how these strategies might be improved further to produce high-quality training. As a result, the following questions were addressed in this study: (1) How do teachers implement humanistic approaches in the classroom to support learning? (2) What is the perceived impact of humanistic teaching strategies on students' academic motivation and engagement? (3) What strategies can they recommend to further enhance the use of humanistic approaches to improve students' learning experiences? According to this qualitative study, humanistic teaching methods are largely interpersonal and learner-centered, emphasizing emotional affirmation, autonomy, and meaningful participation. Teachers use humanistic pedagogy to provide tailored interactions that encourage group learning, affirmation, psychological safety and belonging, and reflection exercises. These tactics increase student involvement, academic confidence, and self-motivation.

Keywords: *Academic engagement; Humanistic approach; Phenomenological study; Student motivation; Teacher experiences.*

Motivation and engagement are closely related to students' participation in class and education. Motivation refers to an individual's tendency, energy, direction, and desire to learn and achieve their dreams. Meanwhile, engagement refers to the thoughts, activities, and emotions that reflect this drive, energy, and desire (Collie & Martin, 2019). Teacher-student connection, control and relevance of schoolwork, peer support for learning, future aspirations and objectives, and family support for learning are rarely manifested and require further engagement in school (Fuertes et al., 2023). Active learning strategies integrated with humanistic pedagogical principles produce significant simultaneous improvements in student learning motivation and

cognitive achievement (Widyawati et al., 2025). The humanistic method is an educational approach that emphasizes overall development, including emotional, moral, and cognitive development (Amini et al., 2025). Which promote respect, empathy, and personal growth, emphasizing the development of the entire person.

Globally, the teaching strategies that emphasize students' emotional, social, and psychological needs while promoting independence and self-directed learning are referred to as humanistic approaches (Ursula, 2024). Additionally, a recent study revealed that teaching strategies such as scaffolding, feedback, active learning, and collaboration significantly boosted both teachers' self-perception and student engagement (Han, 2021). Schools may promote not only academic success, but also emotional intelligence, creativity, and resilience by recognizing each learner's inherent worth and creating spaces that stimulate self-exploration and collaboration (Menidjel, 2024). According to Omodan and Mtshatshat (2022), humanistic pedagogy is most effective at raising students' self-esteem by establishing student-centered classrooms, acknowledging students' feelings and values, encouraging creativity and innovation, and promoting humanity among them. Allowing students to express their wishes and desires will help create a school environment that promotes humanistic values.

Barri (2020) suggests that the classroom environment could be improved by addressing temperature, air quality, quietness, class size, space, and cleanliness. Adopting this strategy is a collaborative effort, with both teachers and students playing important roles in fostering productive interactions. Educational institutions can foster a research-friendly environment by supporting effective leadership, providing institutional support, fostering intrinsic drive, and offering mentorship. This, in turn, has the potential to improve educational quality and educator professional development, resulting in increased productivity in the Philippine basic education system (Capulso et al., 2024).

According to studies on curriculum viability, teaching competence, and effective instruction, effective instruction entails creating a positive learning environment, establishing clear and shared outcomes, employing a variety of instructional methods and materials, encouraging complex thinking and transfer, and providing practice and feedback (Abendaño et al., 2023). To make learning more engaging and meaningful, many schools in the Philippines have begun incorporating humanistic teaching techniques into their curricula. To help students feel appreciated and supported, some educators employ techniques including customized instruction, open communication, and group projects.

A local study found that among Filipino junior high school students, the learning environment and teachers' communication style were important factors in determining student involvement (Cebelleros & Buenaventura, 2024). Moreover, teachers' emotional connection with students significantly affects how students behave and participate in class discussions and other school-related activities. This suggests that a positive learning environment increases students' willingness to actively engage in their studies (Quibod, 2024). Researchers should investigate how humanistic strategies work for different learner populations, such as non-native speakers and those with diverse learning styles (Amini et al., 2025). The emphasis should be on how these strategies foster students' motivation and engagement inside the classroom. The primary goal of this study is to investigate teachers' strategies for motivating students and fostering academic engagement in relation to the humanistic approach implemented in public schools in Davao del Sur, Philippines. It was chosen because the public schools focus on cultural integration and innovative programs and are community-driven.

Nonetheless, teachers are influenced by their location, social environment, personal circumstances, and professional experiences, including their area of assignment (Cabiles, 2024). Teachers need to be informed about the local culture of their assigned area to develop an effective approach suitable for students' needs. Teachers are encouraged to integrate real-world activities that connect students to learning in meaningful ways, helping them acquire the skills and confidence needed for academic and real-world success. The integration of real-world activities prepares students for success in an advanced and information-driven world (Sujatha & Vinayakan, 2023). This study is guided by the following: (1) to determine how these techniques affect students' motivation and engagement, (2) to offer suggestions for how these strategies could be further enhanced to promote high-quality instruction. As a result, the following questions were addressed in this study: (1) How do teachers implement humanistic approaches in the classroom to support learning? (2) What is the perceived impact of humanistic teaching strategies on students' academic motivation and engagement? (3) What strategies can they recommend to enhance the use of humanistic approaches further to improve students' learning experiences?

The results of this study raise awareness among beginning teachers. In particular, this would help (1) Davao del Sur Division of the Department of Education: The study gives them reports and updates on the state of the public schools under their scope. The findings of this study may serve as the foundation for future projects, improvements, and upgrades. (2) The Local Government Unit: This research would offer them a deeper understanding of the province's basic education schools. (3) A school: The information gathered could be used to improve the quality of education through adapting strategies. (4) Future teacher: This may serve as a basis for teaching innovation. (5) Future researchers: The study's findings may be a valuable source of literature for related research.

Methodology

Research Design
This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to understand educators' real-world experiences, perspectives, and actions as they implement strategies. This approach is particularly scientific, rigorous, self-critical, analytical, and systematic. Because it focuses entirely on the exploration of consciousness, phenomenology enables psychology to fulfill its purpose of studying human experience (Wertz, 2023). Furthermore, a qualitative phenomenological study allows researchers to dig deeper into reality to identify similar life experiences (Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega, 2024).

Research Locale
This study was conducted in three public schools within the province of Davao del Sur, Philippines. Davao del Sur is a commercial and cultural hotspot in the Philippines; consequently, the study is designed to accommodate instructors' diverse backgrounds and experiences, enabling a deeper investigation of classroom instruction (Evardo Jr., 2024).

Participants
This study's participants are six teachers with over ten years of experience working in Davao del Sur public schools. The study includes all teachers who have taught at levels 1 to 10. Other inclusion requirements include: teachers of either gender, permanent or regular status, and knowledge of integrating or implementing humanistic approaches in the classroom. They were selected through purposeful random sampling. The researcher selects willing participants based on the specified criteria. According to Dahal et al. (2024), the richness and saturation of information allow researchers to develop a full knowledge of human experiences based on the real viewpoints of individuals who have lived them.

Research Instrument
Open-ended questions are free-form inquiries that allow respondents to respond in natural language. According to Purandare and Patil (2023), open-ended questionnaires allow respondents to convey their emotions, experiences, and in-depth knowledge about a certain subject, event, or circumstance. The interview guide was researcher-made and validated by the researcher's adviser, who is competent in developing research questionnaires, and was distributed to her co-teachers. To collect data, the researcher developed three questionnaires. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes, allowing participants enough time to elaborate on complicated issues. Panyasai and Ambele (2025) found that updating the interview guide to ensure neutrality and coherence, tailoring communication approaches to participants' needs, and effectively incorporating technology tools led to more inclusive and responsive research.

Data Gathering Procedure
The data for this study would be collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which are commonly used in qualitative research to explore participants' lived experiences and perspectives. The researcher would begin by obtaining institutional approval and informed consent from all participants. Interviews would be conducted at a time and in a format convenient for participants—in person or online, spoken or written — to ensure accuracy and thoroughness. These frequently include research questions intended to better understand whether a proposed service is warranted, how it should be offered, and/or how it is currently operating or could be improved from the provider's and/or recipient's perspectives (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Data Analysis Procedure
Thematic analysis was the primary method of analysis. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis is a common qualitative research method that enables researchers to identify, investigate, and comprehend themes or patterns

in qualitative data. (1) Familiarization includes reading and rereading the full dataset in order to become intimately familiar with it, (2) Coding is used to create concise, brief descriptive or interpretive labels for data points that may be relevant to the research question(s), (3) The coded data is evaluated and analysed to determine how different codes might be merged based on related meanings to produce themes or sub-themes, (4) The researcher will undertake an in-depth examination of the potential themes in respect to the coded data items and the overall dataset, (5) Defining and naming the themes to bring out their essence, (6) Finalization of concepts for narrative integration supported by extracted data (Byrne, 2022).

Ethical Considerations
The study strictly adheres to research ethical standards to protect each participant's rights, dignity, and well-being. All records, both written and audio, should be kept in a safe yet immediately accessible area. To avoid misinterpretation and manipulation of findings, participants should be informed how the data was analyzed. Once transcription and translation are complete, researchers should meet with our participants to enhance data credibility and solicit their feedback on the transcripts and the translation accuracy (Mirza, Mirza & Bellalem, 2023).

Results and Discussion
This chapter includes the findings and discussion of a study on teachers' use of humanistic techniques in the classroom and their perceived impact on student motivation and engagement. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis methodology and was based on transcribed interviews with six teachers. The findings are categorized by research question and supported by participant accounts. Three primary themes arose while discussing how teachers utilize humanistic teaching strategies: (1) learner-centered and choice-oriented instruction, (2) emotional validation and relational teaching, and (3) challenges in implementing humanistic practices.

Learner-Centered and Choice-Oriented Instruction
Teachers frequently reported using techniques that placed students at the center of education. Individual students can be better prepared for a rapidly changing world through learner-centered education (An & Mindrila, 2020). These included collaborative learning, group discussions, reflective exercises, peer tutoring, and selection boards. These approaches allowed students to express themselves in ways that suited their abilities and interests. One teacher explained that offering students the option to design posters, role-play, or sing boosted student involvement because "*not everyone is good at drawing, and not everyone is comfortable with drama*" (P3). Such techniques adhere to humanistic principles that value autonomy, self-expression, and personal relevance in learning. These findings align with the principles of humanistic education, which emphasize learner autonomy, self-direction, and meaningful engagement. By allowing students to choose how they demonstrate their learning, teachers foster intrinsic motivation and personal relevance, which in turn promote deeper cognitive engagement and emotional investment in learning activities.

Emotional Validation and Relational Teaching
Another recurring theme was emotional validation through relational education. Teachers emphasized listening to students without passing judgment, addressing them by name, offering praise, and appreciating effort. These tactics encouraged emotional safety and a sense of community in the classroom. According to one participant, "*I name them by their names with positive words… I want to hear your thoughts because your ideas are important*" (P3). Giraldo Salazar (2022) states that after receiving behavior-specific praise, students improved and responded favorably to the positive praising technique. Teachers believed that emotional validation made students feel respected and appreciated, which encouraged them to participate more confidently in class discussions and group projects. This reflects the humanistic emphasis on relationships as the foundation of learning. When students receive emotional validation, their psychological safety and trust are increased, allowing them to freely express their thoughts, ask questions, and take intellectual risks. The findings support theoretical positions that believe that effective learning and active engagement in the classroom depend on emotional stability.

Challenges in Implementing Humanistic Practices
Despite their commitment to humanistic education, teachers reported encountering institutional obstacles, including large class sizes, limited instructional time, curricular pressures, and students' socioeconomic concerns. According to Zydziunaite et al. (2020), teachers with heavier workloads find it more difficult to make time for the variety of activities that occur in the classroom and at school, leading to higher stress and lower self-esteem.

Participants reported difficulty matching emotional support activities to the academic material covered. One instructor noted that adding circle time, reflections, and personal check-ins usually resulted in lost course coverage due to time constraints. These limits point to systemic concerns that prevent the regular adoption of relational pedagogies in traditional educational institutions. These findings highlight structural tensions between relational pedagogy and performance-driven educational systems—moreover, the need for administrative support and legal modifications that allow flexibility for emotionally supportive teaching strategies.

Table 1. *Themes on Teachers' Implementation of Humanistic Approaches*

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Learner-Centered and Choice-Oriented Instruction	Teachers used collaborative learning, reflection, and choice-based activities to support student autonomy and engagement.	*"Choice boards… not everyone is good at drawing, not everyone is comfortable with drama."* (P3)
Emotional Validation and Relational Teaching	Teachers fostered emotional safety through affirmation, listening, and personalized feedback.	*"I name them by their name with positive words… your ideas are important."* (P3)
Challenges in Implementing Humanistic Practices	Structural constraints such as time, class size, and curriculum demands limited sustained humanistic implementation.	*"If I do humanistic… the coverage will never reach."* (P3)

Three primary themes emerged regarding perceived impact: (1) growth in intrinsic motivation and academic confidence, (2) enhanced emotional safety and classroom participation, and (3) holistic assessment of engagement.

Growth in Intrinsic Motivation and Academic Confidence
Teachers noticed that utilizing humanistic approaches enhanced students' energy and excitement. Learners demonstrated increased passion for assignments, volunteered answers more frequently, and put out more effort and preparation. One participant observed a shift in students' motivation from external rewards to internal motives, indicating that students were motivated "*not because of grades, but because they feel important and believed in*" (P3). This demonstrates that supportive learning environments improve internal motivation and academic self-efficacy. The objective is to optimize the advantages of active-learning strategies, not to find a remedy (Aguillon et al., 2020). These findings support models of motivation that emphasize competence, autonomy, and relatedness as sources of intrinsic motivation. Giving students emotional affirmation and choice boosts their self-esteem and increases their engagement with learning tasks.

Enhanced Emotional Safety and Classroom Participation
Participants stated that emotional support helped create a classroom environment in which students felt safe making mistakes, asking questions, and expressing themselves. Teachers observed that shy and introverted students were more engaged when they felt emotionally supported. According to one teacher, pupils submit answers even when they are uncertain because "*they know they will not be laughed at*" (p. 3). This emotional security promoted active involvement and improved peer collaboration. Teachers need first to understand and make students aware of the importance of collaboration skills so that students can meet the challenges of the twenty-first century (Ilma et al., 2021). This is the first step in strengthening students' ability to work together. This lends credence to the idea that emotional safety is the foundation of active learning. Students are more likely to take risks in their studies, collaborate with classmates, and persevere through challenges when they feel accepted and encouraged, which improves classroom engagement and interaction.

Holistic Assessment of Engagement
Teachers evaluated student engagement not only through academic performance, but also through observation, rubrics, reflective journals, peer assessments, and self-evaluation. Peer and self-evaluation seem to be two distinct processes that can influence and complement one another, but evaluating one's own work and providing constructive criticism to peers can be challenging due to several unique cognitive and social factors (Concina, 2022). Several participants included emotional engagement indicators, such as confidence, enthusiasm for contributing, and collaborative behavior, in their assessment methodologies. One teacher suggested adding a rubric item for "*Level of Engagement and Emotional Safety*" to promote a more holistic view of learning beyond cognitive goals. This holistic assessment approach offers a more comprehensive view of learning, considering social, emotional, and cognitive factors. Such approaches align with humanistic perspectives, which view education as a whole-person development process rather than merely academic success.

Table 2. *Themes on the Impact of Humanistic Teaching on Student Motivation and Engagement*

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Growth in Intrinsic Motivation and Academic Confidence	Students showed increased enthusiasm, preparedness, and confidence in learning.	"*Motivation is no longer for grades… but because I feel important here.*" (P3)
Enhanced Emotional Safety and Active Participation	Emotional support encouraged risk-taking, questioning, and collaboration.	"*They will volunteer even if it is wrong because they will not be laughed at.*" (P3)
Holistic Assessment of Engagement	Teachers used performance tasks, rubrics, and reflective tools to assess emotional and academic engagement.	"*I include 'Level of Engagement and Emotional Safety' in my rubric.*" (P3)

Three themes emerged: (1) capacity building through emotional and psychological training, (2) resource-enriched student-centered environments, and (3) collaborative professional culture.

Capacity Building Through Emotional and Psychological Training

Teachers emphasized the need for professional development in emotional intelligence, trauma-informed teaching, child psychology, and mental health awareness. According to Ahmed et al. (2021), the training sessions are not as successful as they should be in inspiring in-service teachers and advancing their professional abilities. Participants stressed the significance of teacher well-being in the long-term success of humanistic approaches. One instructor commented that without emotional support for teachers, it is difficult to provide empathy and care to students. These findings suggest that supporting instructors' mental and emotional well-being enhances their ability to employ compassionate, student-centered teaching strategies. Therefore, professional development programs that emphasize teacher wellness and emotional competency are necessary to preserve humanistic teaching.

Resource-Enriched Student-Centered Learning Environments

Participants advocated for flexible seating, project-based learning, digital platforms, and mental health programs as ways to promote autonomy and relevance in learning. Additionally, compared to traditional schools, academic attainment was higher in flexible learning environments (Kariippanon et al., 2021). Teachers reported that interactive resources such as technological tools, innovative projects, and adaptable classroom design encouraged student engagement and ownership of learning. These technologies support learner agency and meaningful learning experiences in accordance with humanistic pedagogy. These strategies align with humanistic ideas by promoting choice, relevance, creativity, and meaningful learning experiences. More resource-rich environments foster students' intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement with academic content.

Collaborative Professional Culture

Teachers emphasized the importance of collaboration in professional learning communities, peer mentorship, co-planning, and teacher support networks. According to García-Álvarez et al. (2023), instructors benefited from engaging in peer-to-peer teacher exchanges, including improved health, personal development, social support, and information sharing. Participants agreed that shared reflection and collaborative problem-solving led to more consistent adoption of humanistic techniques. One teacher advocated developing "*Humanistic Learning Circles*" and regular wellness activities to encourage educators' professional development and emotional resiliency. This highlights collaboration as an essential tactic for sustaining emotionally sensitive instruction. By encouraging professional growth, emotional support, and instructional coherence, collaborative cultures reinforce the relational foundations of humanistic education.

Table 3. *Themes on Strategies to Enhance Humanistic Teaching Practices*

Theme	Description	Representative Responses
Capacity Building Through Emotional and Psychological Training	Teachers emphasized training in emotional intelligence, trauma-informed pedagogy, and wellness.	"*We need training in emotional intelligence and trauma teaching.*" (P3)
Resource-Enriched Student-Centered Learning Environments	Flexible seating, project-based learning, and digital tools enhanced autonomy and engagement.	"*PBL, flexible seating, and tech stations make learning more engaging.*" (P3)
Collaborative Professional Culture	Peer mentoring, co-planning, and professional learning communities strengthened implementation.	"*Let us plan Humanistic Learning Circles every month.*" (P3)

Conclusion

This qualitative study indicates that humanistic teaching approaches are essentially interpersonal and learner-centered, emphasizing emotional affirmation, autonomy, and meaningful involvement. Teachers use humanistic pedagogy through personalized interactions that support group learning, affirmation, psychological safety, and a sense of belonging, as well as through reflective activities. These techniques increase students' involvement, academic confidence, and self-motivation. The findings further show that emotional safety is a crucial element of student involvement. When they feel valued, respected, and inspired, students are more likely to take academic risks, persevere through challenges, and participate fully in class activities.

Teachers' holistic evaluation processes foster the understanding that learning includes both cognitive and emotional dimensions. Teachers still have to cope with systemic problems that hinder long-term acceptance, such as curriculum requirements, time constraints, large class sizes, and socioeconomic considerations. These challenges highlight the need for institutional reforms that prioritize emotional health, educational flexibility, and teacher support. The research also highlights the importance of professional development for trauma-informed teaching, emotional intelligence, and teacher wellness. Collaborative professional cultures and resource-rich learning settings further support the sustainability of humanistic pedagogy. Overall, the findings demonstrate that humanistic approaches significantly improve students' motivation, engagement, and holistic development and that institutional support is required for long-term adoption.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this work.

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