

---

**AM I GOOD ENOUGH? AN INTERPRETATIVE  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF IMPOSTER SYNDROME  
AMONG EARLY-CAREER TEACHERS**

---

\*Jorelie Del Carmen

---

Philippines.

---

Article Received: 25 March 2026

\*Corresponding Author: Jorelie Del Carmen

Article Revised: 15 April 2026

Philippines.

Published on: 05 May 2026

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.7534>

---

### **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the lived experiences of early career teachers experiencing imposter syndrome, a psychological condition marked by persistent self-doubt despite demonstrated competence. Although widely studied in other professions, limited qualitative research exists in education, particularly among novice teachers navigating identity formation and workplace pressures. The study aims to understand how early career teachers construct and negotiate their sense of competence, manage imposter feelings, and sustain their professional identity. Using a qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis design, data were collected from 25 early career elementary teachers in the 2nd Congressional District of Cotabato through semi structured interviews. Purposive sampling ensured participants had relevant lived experiences, while thematic analysis enabled identification of recurring patterns across cases. Trustworthiness was ensured through established qualitative research criteria. Findings reveal that imposter syndrome is shaped by classroom challenges, social expectations, and institutional pressures that distort self-perception and reduce confidence. Teachers cope through mentorship, reflective practices, and professional development, though many experience emotional strain, reduced wellbeing, and career uncertainty. The study provides context specific insights into teacher identity and wellbeing and informs interventions focused on mentoring, psychological support, and professional growth for early career educators.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Imposter syndrome is a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent self-doubt and difficulty in internalizing one's achievements despite evident competence. It remains a significant issue in high-demand professions such as teaching, where increasing accountability, technological demands, and diverse learner needs intensify feelings of inadequacy. Most existing studies focus on corporate, medical, and STEM fields, leaving the teaching profession underexplored, particularly through qualitative approaches. Early-career teachers are especially vulnerable as they navigate identity formation, mentorship challenges, and performance expectations during the early stages of their careers. This study addresses this gap by using a phenomenological approach to explore how teachers make sense of their experiences with imposter syndrome. Specifically, it examines how they construct and negotiate their sense of competence, identify coping strategies, and understand the impact of imposter feelings on their professional identity, wellbeing, and career development.

## **METHOD**

This study utilized a qualitative research design, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore the lived experiences of early-career teachers dealing with imposter syndrome. The participants consisted of 25 early-career elementary teachers with less than five years of teaching experience from the 2nd Congressional District of Cotabato. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants could provide relevant and meaningful insights. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences in depth while enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes. The research procedure included securing permissions, obtaining informed consent, conducting interviews, and transcribing responses for analysis. The data were analyzed following IPA procedures, which involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding significant statements, clustering themes, and interpreting meanings within the participants' contexts. This approach allowed for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the teachers' subjective experiences.

## **RESULTS**

The findings of the study revealed several significant themes regarding the experiences of early-career teachers with imposter syndrome. Teachers often struggled with constructing their sense of competence and legitimacy due to classroom challenges, negative feedback, and perceived gaps in knowledge and skills. Despite these challenges, their confidence

gradually developed through experience, validation from others, and observable student success. In terms of coping strategies, teachers relied on professional competence reinforcement through preparation and training, social support from mentors and colleagues, cognitive and emotional regulation through reflection and positive self-talk, and personal strategies such as organization, creativity, and rest. The study also found that imposter syndrome negatively impacted teachers' professional identity and wellbeing, leading to distorted self-perception, increased anxiety, burnout, and hesitation in pursuing career advancement opportunities. Additionally, the findings emphasized the need for effective dissemination of research and institutional support, highlighting the importance of psychological safety, accessible communication of findings, and supportive school environments. Policy-related insights pointed to the necessity of mental health programs, structured mentoring systems, workload management, and career development initiatives to address the challenges faced by early-career teachers.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the study indicate that imposter syndrome among early-career teachers is not solely an individual psychological issue but is also shaped by institutional, social, and cultural factors. The findings support theoretical perspectives such as Social Cognitive Theory and Professional Identity Formation Theory, which emphasize the role of self-efficacy, social interactions, and environmental influences in shaping professional confidence. The coping strategies identified in the study highlight the importance of mentorship, collaboration, and reflective practices in helping teachers manage self-doubt. However, persistent imposter feelings can lead to negative outcomes such as burnout, reduced innovation, and potential attrition from the profession. Therefore, addressing imposter syndrome requires a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening teacher induction programs, promoting mental health awareness, creating psychologically safe work environments, and implementing supportive educational policies. Ultimately, improving teacher wellbeing is essential for sustaining a competent and motivated teaching workforce and for enhancing the overall quality of education.