



FROM CLASSROOMS TO CLINICS: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN HANDLING STUDENT HEALTH ISSUES

Kristene C. Mansueto¹, Joju Amor D. Villajos²

¹Master of Arts in Elementary Education, St. Mary's Tagum College, Inc., Philippines

²St. Mary's Tagum College, Inc., Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative-phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of elementary teachers in handling student health issues. The participants of the study were 12 clinic coordinators selected through purposive sampling technique. Six participants were interviewed through in-depth interview (IDI), while the remaining six participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). Thematic analysis was utilized in analyzing the gathered data. The lived experiences of the participants included providing immediate first aid and basic medical care for common student health complaints, managing emergencies and referring students to external health facilities, dealing with lack of adequate facilities, medical supplies, and equipment for student health care, handling the dual roles of teacher and health provider, balancing teaching and health duties through prioritization and classroom routines, and delayed parental reply affecting timely medication or referral. The coping mechanisms employed by the participants were developing confidence and competence through experience, maintaining a positive and compassionate attitude, utilizing collegial support systems, and enaging external community health support. The insights and recommendations shared by the participants included strengthening institutional support, resources, and budget allocation, enhancing medical supplies, equipment and clinic resources, expanding capacity building emergency response training for teachers, improving stakeholders collaboration and communication, and establishing clear guidelines and referral systems. The findings of this study are significant to teachers, school administrators, parents, DepEd officials, and future researchers, as these provide meaningful insights into the realities faced by elementary teachers in addressing student health concerns. Furthermore, the study may contribute to the improvement of school health services, policy development, teacher preparedness, and support systems in managing student health issues within the school setting.

KEYWORDS: Student Health Issues, Elementary Teachers, School Clinic, Qualitative Research, Phenomenological Approach, Thematic Analysis, Davao Del Norte, Philippines

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Elementary teachers are entrusted with children's learning and well-being, yet they often become the first line of response when students experience health concerns at school. Addressing illness and injury requires teachers to provide immediate care and make health-related decisions despite limited medical preparation. This responsibility creates a demanding intersection between their instructional role and their obligation to protect student welfare.

Internationally, Hinton and Kirk (2014) found that teachers experienced uncertainty when supporting students with health conditions. In the Philippines, Villanueva et al. (2022) reported that additional non teaching responsibilities increase teachers' workload. Comparable in Region XI, Lopez (2020) noted that limited school health personnel may require teachers to assume clinic responsibilities despite limited medical training. These concerns demonstrate the need to understand how teachers experience the demands of managing student health within the school setting. Although existing research has addressed teacher preparedness, school health programs, and additional teacher responsibilities, limited research has examined the lived experiences of elementary

teachers who serve as school clinic coordinators. This study therefore explores the experiences, challenges, coping responses, and insights of elementary teachers handling students' health issues in the Division of Davao del Norte. The findings may provide relevant evidence for improving teacher preparation, institutional support, and school health services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of elementary teachers on students' health issues in the Division of Davao del Norte. It sought to understand their challenges, responses, and insights to improve teacher preparation, health awareness, and school support systems for student well-being.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of elementary teachers in handling student health issues?
2. How do they cope with and respond to health-related challenges of their students?



3. What insights and recommendations do teachers offer to improve school support systems for managing student health concerns?

Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored in Bandura's Self Efficacy Theory, which explains how teachers' confidence in addressing students' health concerns influences their responses to health related situations. This is supplemented by Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Model which examines how relationships, school policies, resources, training, and institutional expectations shape teachers' experiences. Finally, Teacher Leadership proposed by Katzenmeyer and Moller provides a lens for understanding teachers' expanded responsibilities as they support student health alongside classroom instruction. Overall, these perspectives examine teachers' experiences through personal, environmental, and professional dimensions. Thus, the three lenses provide a coherent framework for understanding how teachers navigate the demands of serving as both educators and school clinic coordinators.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on 12 elementary teachers from 12 schools in New Corella District, Davao del Norte, who handle students' health concerns and serve as school clinic coordinators or persons in charge. Six participants joined in depth interviews, while six participated in a focus group discussion during the first half of 2026. The study examines teachers' experiences, challenges, coping responses, and perceptions. It excludes the perspectives of students, parents, health personnel, and other school staff. The qualitative design and localized sample limit generalizability but allow an in depth understanding of the phenomenon within the study setting.

Importance of the Study

This study may provide the Department of Education and school administrators with evidence to strengthen teacher preparation, school health policies, resource allocation, and coordination with health personnel. For teachers, the findings may increase understanding of effective ways to manage students' health concerns while fulfilling instructional responsibilities. For learners, stronger school health support may promote timely care, safety, and well being. The study may identify gaps in institutional support and guide appropriate training and assistance for teachers assigned to school clinic responsibilities. Finally, the findings may serve as a reference for future researchers examining teachers' expanded roles and school health services.

Definition of Terms

From Classrooms to Clinics. Refers to teachers' assumption of health related responsibilities in addition to classroom instruction.

Elementary Teachers. Refers to licensed public elementary school teachers who assist in addressing students' health concerns.

Handling Health Issues. Refers to teachers' actions in identifying, responding to, and managing students' health concerns within the school setting.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, research purpose, questions, theoretical framework, scope, importance of the study, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and studies. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings. Chapter 5 discusses the findings and presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews literature on teachers' experiences, coping strategies, and insights in handling students' health concerns.

Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers in Handling Student Health Issues

Teachers increasingly assume health-related responsibilities alongside instruction, particularly where health personnel are limited. Conroy et al. (2024) found that teachers often serve as first responders in schools without health practitioners. In the Philippine context, Arañas (2023) similarly reported that teachers in remote schools assume caregiving responsibilities when medical personnel are unavailable, interrupting instruction and requiring them to adjust their priorities. These responsibilities position teachers as important sources of health support, particularly where dedicated health personnel are limited.

However, these responsibilities are often accompanied by inadequate preparation and unclear expectations. De Guzman et al. (2022) found that teachers performing health-related tasks experience anxiety and stress. Meanwhile, Lopez (2020) noted that limited health personnel may require teachers to assume clinic responsibilities despite limited training. These findings highlight the competing responsibilities and emotional demands teachers face in managing student health concerns alongside their instructional duties, emphasizing the need for clear roles, adequate preparation, and institutional support.

Coping Strategies and Responses to Health-Related Challenges

Teachers use personal strategies to manage health-related responsibilities. As mentioned by Dinero and Oco (2024), teachers employ emotion-focused and problem-focused coping, allowing them to manage the emotional and practical demands associated with responding to student health concerns. These strategies may help teachers remain responsive to students while continuing to fulfill their instructional responsibilities despite the additional demands placed on them.

Additionally, Bacasmot and Beduya (2024) reported the use of time management, teamwork, and emotional resilience despite exhaustion and limited administrative support. Similarly, Ellovido and Quirap (2024) found that teachers adjust coping strategies according to circumstances, using emotional regulation for uncontrollable situations and planning for manageable concerns. These findings indicate that coping with health-related responsibilities involves flexibility, emotional regulation, teamwork, and practical planning as teachers navigate competing responsibilities within the school setting.



Insights of Elementary Teachers on Their Ancillary Health Roles

Teachers' ancillary health roles shape how they understand their responsibilities to students. In the study of Lasco et al. (2023), results found that teachers experience frustration from limited training, workload, and unclear expectations, yet also gain fulfillment from supporting students' health needs. These experiences show that ancillary health responsibilities influence how teachers perceive their professional roles while balancing instructional duties and student health concerns.

Teachers' perspectives also reflect the professional value of these responsibilities. Villanueva et al. (2022) found that additional welfare responsibilities develop leadership skills and professional commitment. Furthermore, Hofmann et al. (2022) found that health-related duties can strengthen teachers' sense of purpose. Taken together, the literature suggests that teachers view ancillary health roles as both demanding and meaningful, while recognizing the need for clear expectations, preparation, and institutional support.

Ultimately, the literature indicates that teachers navigate health responsibilities through coping and collaboration amid limited preparation and institutional limits. These demands create stress and uncertainty while fostering growth and fulfillment. Yet, limited evidence addresses elementary clinic coordinators' experiences in Davao del Norte.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, participants, researcher's role, data sources, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore elementary teachers' lived experiences in addressing students' health concerns (Creswell, 2013). This approach captures the meanings, challenges, and coping experiences embedded in teachers' firsthand accounts.

Research Participants

The participants were twelve (12) elementary teachers designated as School Clinic Coordinators in New Corella District, Division of Davao del Norte. Six participated in IDIs and six in an FGD. Purposive sampling was used, with participants required to have at least two years of experience as School Clinic Coordinators. Substitute, probationary, and less-experienced teachers were excluded.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher conducted IDIs and the FGD, recorded and transcribed discussions, translated responses when necessary, and conducted member checking. In addition, bracketing was practiced to set aside personal assumptions.

Data Sources

The primary data sources were the twelve School Clinic Coordinators who shared experiences through IDIs and an FGD. On the other hand, the secondary sources included school clinic policies, DepEd memoranda and guidelines,

training handouts, and orientation materials to provide context and support triangulation.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher secured approval from the Research Ethics Committee and Graduate School, followed by permission from the Division Superintendent of Davao del Norte and school principals. Participants were oriented and signed informed consent forms. IDIs and the FGD were conducted using the validated guide. With permission, sessions were recorded, transcribed, and translated when necessary. Recordings and transcripts were securely stored in password-protected files.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), involving 6 phases: familiarizing with the data, generating codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The researcher reviewed transcripts, coded significant statements, clustered related codes, reviewed themes, and interpreted them according to the research questions.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through iterative questioning, member checking, and triangulation. Dependability was supported through documentation and peer debriefing. Confirmability was addressed through a reflexive journal and audit trail. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, roles, and experiences (Mcleod, 2024).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles concerning social value, informed consent, safety, privacy and confidentiality, justice, transparency, researcher qualification, facilities, and community involvement (Arellano et al., 2023). Participation was voluntary, with participants informed of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and right to refuse or withdraw. Potential risks were minimal and involved possible emotional discomfort. Privacy and confidentiality were protected through codes and password-protected storage in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings on the experiences, coping strategies, and insights of elementary teachers in handling student health issues.

The Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers in Handling Student Health Issues

The findings revealed that elementary teachers assume health-related responsibilities despite limited medical training and resources. Six themes emerged: providing immediate first aid and basic care for common health complaints; managing



emergencies and referring serious cases to health facilities; dealing with lack of adequate facilities, medical supplies, and equipment for student health care; handling the dual roles of teacher and health provider; balancing teaching and health duties through prioritization and classroom routines; and delayed parental reply affecting timely medication or referral.

Teachers' Coping Strategies and Responses to Health-Related Challenges

Teachers developed strategies to manage health-related challenges while fulfilling their teaching and clinic coordinator roles. Four essential themes emerged, which includes developing confidence and competence through experience; maintaining a positive and compassionate attitude; utilizing collegial support systems; and engaging external and community health support. These strategies reflect teachers' adaptability in addressing student health concerns.

Teachers' Insights and Recommendations for Improving School Support Systems

Teachers identified measures to strengthen school support systems for student health concerns. Five emerging themes surfaced: strengthening institutional support, resources, and budget allocation; enhancing medical supplies, equipment, and clinic resources; expanding emergency response training for teachers; improving stakeholder collaboration and communication; and establishing clear health guidelines and referral systems. These emphasize coordinated and sustainable school health support.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the study findings in relation to relevant literature and presents implications, recommendations, and concluding remarks.

The Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers in Handling Student Health Issues

The findings indicate that elementary teachers regularly assume health-related responsibilities alongside teaching duties, including basic first aid, emergency response, referral, and coordination with parents and health facilities. Limited resources, overlapping responsibilities, and communication difficulties with parents shaped these experiences.

These findings are consistent with Neyişci (2024), who found that resource limitations and organizational barriers make it difficult for primary teachers to address students' health needs. In the local context, Atillo et al. (2025) emphasized the need for adequate training and institutional support for teachers responding to student health concerns. Thus, teachers' health-related responsibilities depend not only on their willingness to assist learners but also on the availability of appropriate school health support systems.

Teachers' Coping Mechanisms/Strategies and Responses to Health-Related Challenges of Their Students

The findings revealed that teachers manage health-related demands through experience, compassion, reflection,

and support from colleagues and administrators. Repeated exposure to health situations strengthened their confidence and commitment, while reflection and optimism helped them remain engaged despite additional responsibilities. Fronda and Dioso (2025) similarly highlighted reflection and optimism as strategies that help teachers sustain their commitment while managing health-related tasks. These findings demonstrate teachers' adaptability while also highlighting their reliance on interpersonal support when formal preparation is limited.

Insights and Recommendations from Teachers to Improve School Support Systems for Managing Student Health Concerns

The participants recommended strengthening institutional support, resources, teacher training, stakeholder collaboration, and referral mechanisms. These findings indicate that effective school health management requires coordinated support rather than reliance on individual teachers. Christian and Sayed (2023) emphasized the importance of institutional support and adequate resources, while Atillo et al. (2025) highlighted the need for teacher training and institutional support. Schools therefore need adequate preparation, resources, and clear referral systems to enable teachers to respond appropriately while maintaining their instructional responsibilities.

Implications for Teaching Practice

The findings show that teachers must balance instructional duties with students' health needs. Schools should provide first-aid and emergency training, adequate health supplies, functional clinics, clear referral procedures, and access to health personnel. Clear roles and coordination among teachers, administrators, parents, and health providers can support timely responses without making teachers substitute health professionals.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies may examine teachers' experiences across school settings and geographic areas. Mixed-method and comparative studies may assess preparedness, training, health resources, and institutional support.

Concluding Remarks

The study highlights teachers' commitment and adaptability despite limited training and institutional constraints. Effective school health management requires continuous training, adequate resources, clear referral systems, and stakeholder collaboration to protect student well-being while supporting teachers' instructional responsibilities.

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