



TAKING VARIOUS STEPS IN THE SCHOOL ACTIVITIES: IMMERSIONS OF INTERMEDIATE GRADE TEACHERS IN PANABO CENTRAL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

My study's goal was to learn about the experiences of male intermediate teachers in Panabo District, Davao del Norte, by listening to them recount their stories. I used the qualitative phenomenological approach in conjunction with thematic analysis to accomplish the research goals. Following Cresswell's (2006) recommendations, open-ended interview questions were used to gain a genuine grasp of the participant's experiences. Additionally, by using this interviewing technique, I pushed my participants to talk candidly and completely about their personal experiences or the significance of the phenomenon under investigation – in this case, their experiences as male elementary school teachers. According to the findings of the thematic analysis of the study participants' responses, the following conclusions and related topics emerged: The involvements of intermediate male teachers in various school activities were on Implementing positive discipline; Trying to be a positive male role model; and Providing school support. The coping mechanisms of the male teachers were: Seeking Support from School Leaders and other teachers; Setting Boundaries at work area and Taking a break on school work. The educational management insights were focused on two factors: Setting a positive school environment and Establishing personal connections with stakeholders.

KEYWORDS- *Taking Various Steps, School Activities, Immersions of Intermediate Grade Teachers, Panabo Central District*

INTRODUCTION

The beginning of knowledge accumulation starts with a single step. Through these small steps, learners begin their formal lifelong journey toward knowing what is happening around them and learning new knowledge. These learning practices would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of all teachers. These teachers are considered the base of elementary learners' lifelong learning journey. It is through these teachers the knowledge of the learners is gradually built -up and being enriched by the incoming lessons learned from the classroom activities of the child.

Rahman et al (2022) reported that the past pandemic had impacted teachers' lives professionally and personally across the world. In many parts of the world kindergarten teachers have been able to adapt practices to ensure that children's education and care are provided. However, some countries have not responded adequately to support the teachers' ongoing employment. Bangladesh is one such country. significant disruption to their professional and personal lives during the pandemic. With the long-term closures of schools and early childhood services, the teachers were found to be significantly impacted resulting in hardship to their personal, physical, human, and social lives. Governments are called on to demonstrate value and support the elementary teachers at all times, not only during the pandemic. Such support will sustain the early childhood profession, and ensure the rights of young children to access consistent education and care are met.

As an elementary teacher, you face several new and unique challenges on an everyday basis. You often find yourself struggling with establishing the right curriculum, dealing with the different needs of toddlers at the same time, and communicating minor details about the kids with the parents. The classroom is a completely new world and paradigm for the kids, so striking a balance between conducting the classes successfully and providing answers to the curiosities of the kids becomes crucial (Illumine Labs, 2019).

Park (2018) also suggested that understanding of the early childhood curriculum by the teachers is crucial for proper implementation of the curriculum to help achieve its goals. This means that once preschool teachers do not comprehend the early childhood curriculum's theoretical and practical framework in detail, they will not be able to successfully implement the early childhood curriculum.

Ntumi (2019) reported that elementary teachers are faced with a lot of challenges in implementing the early childhood curriculum. A notable one among them is that most preschool teachers do not understand the early childhood curriculum, preschool teachers do not have enough teaching and learning materials to help them implement the Early childhood curriculum, and parents do not involve themselves in their ward's education, therefore, it makes it difficult for pre-school to do the work alone. It was also revealed that teachers, teaching, and learning materials are the main factors that influence the implementation of the early childhood curriculum.



Kern, Kruse, and Roehring (2020) also maintain the idea that teachers' perceptions about teaching and learning strongly influence the implementation of early childhood curricula. In other words, once the teachers are defending the ideology of the curriculum being implemented, then the performance of the pre-school teachers in the real classroom setting is affected positively during implementation.

In the Philippine context, Botoy (2020) postulated that the job of a teacher starts on the very first day in the life of a kindergarten pupil. This is because learning is developed through several phases. So, if a teacher fails to open the hearts and minds of pupils to the importance of education and values, it would be a stumbling block for pupils to be productive in the succeeding year levels. The most unfortunate consequence of this will surely be low-skilled graduates and human resources. Long-term educational outcomes and educational development for every student start from preschool age. Lifelong learning and professional development, as predictors of quality, need to be regarded as ongoing tasks for kindergarten teachers. She revealed that public school teachers were very much challenged in the implementation of the primary grade program, while private school teachers experienced much of the challenges encountered. Further, there was a difference in teachers' challenges in the implementation of the program between public and private schools which was evident in all areas.

Additionally, Miguel-Mina (2018) speculated that there is no doubt that education in the early years is crucial, providing access to education to young children is only the first step. The next step and a more crucial factor to the children's success is the quality of early childhood education they receive. Premised on this idea, an equally important question that early childhood educators consider is what factors determine quality in preschool years. The success in early childhood education zeroes in consideration of curriculum. Curriculum, with its emphasis on child-centered principles, is in many cases, difficult to fully implement due to issues such as class size, lack of equipment and the absence of appropriate in-career development for preschool teachers.

Further, Larawan (2023) reported issues by the elementary teachers in terms of encouraging children's active involvement, lack of workbooks for every pupil, and pupils' talkativeness. School administrators often stated problems were related to the unavailability of classrooms intended for kindergarten classes, insufficient funds for classroom materials, the inadequacy of classroom instructional materials, delayed release of salaries of teachers, small classroom environment, unavailability of workbooks for every pupil, lack of parental involvement at home, and lack of plantilla position for kindergarten teacher.

In the local scenario, specifically in Panabo Central Elementary School SPED Center I have observed that most of the primary grade teachers had several issues and concerns about teaching and dealing with the learners due to separation anxiety of the learners as well as the parents, the previous experiences of learners from the lower grade levels as well as those at home and probably from their previous learning exposures from the lower grade levels. The elementary teachers may have experienced various difficulties in their classroom management and dealings. It is in these premise that this study is being conducted to unearth the cry of these teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Western Governors University (2023) explained that being elementary teacher means instructing younger children who are in a school environment for the first time in their lives. Usually, the age range of kids in kindergarten can span from four to six, so it's important for these teachers to have emotional intelligence, helping them to determine how to deal with a variety of young personalities and how to connect them to their schoolwork.

Elementary teachers' competence and dedication to teaching amidst the so challenging profession are valuable determinants to the success of childhood and lifelong student learning. Recent studies suggested a link between educational outcomes and early experiences in the primary educational environments of family and kindergarten (Criddle, 2018).

Many complexities come along with being an early childhood educator: 8 common problems faced by preschool teachers (Illumine, 2022).

Managing the kids. Handling a classroom full of toddlers is never an easy task. Although it brings its own set of delightful moments, it can very well be exhausting. Every kid in the class has a different need, and catering to each of them while trying to instill productivity and creativity can be quite challenging. It takes a lot of patience and effort to retain the attention of the kids, who tend to get distracted easily.

Executing the school curriculum. Along with struggling to teach the lessons and get the message across while managing several kids at once, preschool teachers face several other challenges in terms of effectively implementing the school's curriculum.

Communicating with the parents. Keeping parents at par with their kid's everyday learning and growth is one of the most important steps in the process of teaching toddlers. In other words, clear and transparent parent communication is another essential responsibility of the early education teachers.



Handling paperwork. Elementary teachers need to maintain and update piles of paperwork daily. These documents usually include attendance records, meal plans, lesson plans, and class activities, amongst other things. On average, early childhood educators spend 45 minutes each day on documentation. This accounts for a huge amount of time, when we take the various other activities they do daily such as teaching, managing the kids, taking care of, and recording their meals and nap times into consideration.

Low salaries. One of the reports by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment of the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at the University of California, Berkeley states that on average, an early childhood educator earns just about \$22,000 annually. This figure, when compared to the other jobs out there, is almost shocking and demotivating. The uneven balance between the pay and the amount of workload is just another pressure point for the teachers.

Lack of recognition and value. The work that elementary teachers do is honest and humble, but also very crucial. Some of the most important cognitive developments in a child happen before the age of 5, hence, by investing time and energy into making sure the toddlers grow into their best version, the teachers are not just helping out the parents but also laying the initial bricks that will form the foundation of the skills and intellect that a child develops upon growing up.

Inability to seek new opportunities. Most of the time, a elementary teacher is occupied with taking care of all the commitments they have at their respective childcare institutions. Hence, they barely have any time to focus on themselves or their careers. This often gets stuck at where they are in their lives, with no time or opportunities to grow.

Hindered career growth. Because of their hectic schedules and already preoccupied lives, preschool teachers don't get a chance to look out for or go after new opportunities, and the room for growth is very little for them. This is what results in early childhood teachers being frustrated with their jobs, and is also a factor behind why many people, even if interested, don't pursue this career.

ChildCare Education Institute (2022) explained that one of the leading problems facing early childhood education is an escalating rate of teacher burnout. According to a 2022 poll, nearly half of all preschool teachers admitted to experiencing high levels of stress and burnout over the past few years. While some of that stress is inherent to the job, most of the additional burnout has come from a severe staffing shortage affecting centers and programs across the country. Since early 2020, 8.4% of the childcare workforce has left for other professions which is especially worrying considering many centers were experiencing staffing problems before the pandemic. As a result, the teachers that stayed are dealing with longer hours, larger classrooms, and in some cases, new, mixed-age teaching environments. For those educators lucky enough to find themselves at fully staffed centers, there are still a number of new stressors brought about by COVID-19, including new safety measures, check-in protocols, and more.S

Research Questions

1. What are the involvements of intermediate male teachers in various school activities?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of intermediate male teachers on the challenges related to their school involvements?
3. What educational management insights are drawn from the findings of the study?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used qualitative research employing phenomenology. Interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. The interview(s) attempt to answer two broad questions (Moustakas, 1994). The data was then read and reread and culled for like phrases and themes that were then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process, the researcher constructed the universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

In this study, phenomenology attempts to extract the purest, untainted data, and in some interpretations of the approach, bracketing is used by the researcher to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove them from the process. One method of bracketing is memoing (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Participants

The study involved eight (8) informants who were male elementary school teachers from Panabo District, Davao del Norte. All participants must have at least three (3) years of experience teaching at the elementary level. The informants were selected from various nearby schools and all were teaching at the intermediate grade level, regardless of their age, sex, or marital status.

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions may lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five (5) to 25



and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (6). There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research.

Data Analysis

In this study, all the data collected were carefully examined and thoughtfully analyzed. The researcher first described personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The researcher began with a full description of his own experience of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences so that the focus can be directed to the participants. He developed a list of significant statements. He then finds statements about how the individual was experiencing the topic, lists these significant statements as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of non-repetitive, nonoverlapping, statements. The researcher took the significant statements and then grouped them into larger units of information, called "meaning units" or themes. He wrote a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. Next, he wrote a description of "how" the experience happened. This was called "structural description," and the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. Finally, he wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This passage is the "essence" of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study.

Thematic Content Analysis. A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. One of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it's a flexible method which can be for both explorative studies, where the researcher do not have a clear idea of what patterns are being searched for, as well as for more deductive studies, where the researcher know exactly what he is interested in. No matter which type of study is being done and for what purpose, the most important thing in the analysis is that the researcher respects the data and tries to represent the results of the interview as honestly as possible (Montensen, 2020).

Triangulation of Data. Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. This is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection. However, the purpose of triangulation is not necessarily to cross-validate data but rather to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon (Alele, 2023).

Environmental triangulation. The use of Environmental triangulation is limited only to those studies where the findings can be influenced by certain environmental factors. This type of triangulation uses different settings, locations, and other factors such as time, day, and season in which the study took place. The idea is to determine which of these factors influence the information received, these factors are then changed to see if the findings are the same. If the findings remain unaltered under varying environmental factors, then validity can be established (Naeem, Saira, 2019). In this study, such triangulation was used considering that the requirements as mentioned is the use of environmental triangulation best suited to the environment of the research being conducted.

Framework of analysis. According to Braun and Clark (2006) methods of qualitative data analysis fall into two groups. The first group consists of methods driven by an epistemological or theoretical position, which have limited variability in how they are applied within their frameworks, such as conversation analysis (CA) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and methods which are situated within a broad theoretical framework and can therefore be used in a variety of ways within those frameworks, such as grounded theory (GT), discourse analysis (DA) narrative analysis (NA).

The second group includes methods independent of theory and epistemology, which can be applied across a range of different theoretical and epistemological approaches and are therefore very flexible. One such method is thematic analysis, which, through theoretical freedom, "provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

I observed several steps in conducting a thematic analysis. The first stage in extracting qualitative data for analysis from the recordings was transcription. This was done to gain greater familiarity with the data and deeper insight. I relied on my own resources to do the transcription with the use of my personal computer and some reliable headphones. I used several nights to listen to the interviews to deepen my understanding of the nuances of the language and semantics of the participants.

Practice varied considerably in terms of agreeing conventions with transcribers. Some negotiated themselves to lay out and conventions required, including researchers who wanted the kind of detailed transcriptions appropriate for conversations or narrative analysis. Others were sometimes less directly involved and accepted the conventions generally used by the one transcribing the information.

The next step was data extraction and analysis. I used manual techniques based on note-taking and summary while listening to the recordings. My manual technique usually included some process of verbatim recordings of selected spoken words. I selected quotations about central issues, or when what was said seemed important or interesting.

I used a number of different techniques as taught to me by my thesis adviser. I marked up transcripts with colored pens or sorted data by cutting and pasting. I used forms of thematic grids and charts, the framework technique as developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie et al, 2003). This technique was useful to me in the



process of coding, sorting, and collecting data for interrogation. This technique was very useful in understanding links and relationships between issues. All these efforts and procedures included saving verbatim spoken words from the transcripts, which could be cross-referenced to the thematic displays or the maps.

To summarize, the thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consisted of six (6) phases, was used in analyzing the data.

Phase 1. I familiarized myself with the data by reading the whole data set and noting down initial ideas.

Phase 2. I generated initial codes, with code being the most basic segments of the raw data that can identify a feature of the data that appears interesting;

Phase 3. I searched for themes by sorting different codes into potential themes and collate all data extracts within identified themes;

Phase 4. I reviewed the themes and refine them further (at the level of coded data extracts and the entire data set) and produce a thematic map showing relationships between themes and sub-themes;

Phase 5. I defined and named themes, making sure they give the reader an immediate sense of what the theme is all about.

Phase 6. I wrote the report to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (within and across the themes), and use data extracts embedded within an analytic narrative to make arguments about the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an overview of the study's findings, from which I derived the implications and future directions. My study's goal was to learn about the experiences of male intermediate teachers in Panabo District, Davao del Norte, by listening to them recount their stories.

I used the qualitative phenomenological approach in conjunction with thematic analysis to accomplish the research goals. Following Creswell's (2006) recommendations, open-ended interview questions were used to gain a genuine grasp of the participant's experiences. Additionally, by using this interviewing technique, I pushed my participants to talk candidly and completely about their personal experiences or the significance of the phenomenon under investigation—in this case, their experiences as male elementary school teachers.

According to the findings of the thematic analysis of the study participants' responses, the following conclusions and related topics emerged: The involvements of intermediate male teachers in various school activities were on Implementing positive discipline; Trying to be a positive male role model; and Providing school support. The coping mechanisms of the male teachers were: Seeking Support from School Leaders and other teachers; Setting Boundaries at work area and Taking a break on school work. The educational management insights were focused on two factors: Setting a positive school environment and Establishing personal connections with stakeholders.

Implications

The experiences of male intermediate elementary teachers in Panabo District, Davao del Norte revealed several facts in terms of their involvements as teachers.

The experiences of the male intermediate elementary teachers revealed three themes. One of which was implementing positive discipline. By the mere implementation of a positive discipline, it would mean that any learner who may commit problems at school may be disciplined positively. Although there are many learners at the school, there are many ways to correct their mistakes in a positive way by acknowledging their actions and giving them insights on how to do things better in the future.

The second theme that emerged from the male teacher's involvements in the school was trying to be a positive male role model. Although it is not easy to become a role model for the learners, the teachers tried their very best to serve as the second parents in the school, showing their best character and care for all the learners under their care.

The third theme that emerged from the male teacher's involvements was on providing school support. To provide school support would mean that the male teachers were always around and present to assist all the school personnel in the implementation of the school programs throughout the school year. The school support being mentioned by the participants means that they were physically involved in the implementation of school programs such as the Brigada Eskwela, building repairs that can be done in simple ways, school projects, and other pertinent activities that entail their presence. These were just a few of the male teachers' involvements as noted during the in-depth interviews among the participants of this study.

On the coping mechanisms of the participants, it revealed three themes. The first theme was on seeking support from school leaders and other teachers. Despite the heavy burdens encountered by the male teachers in Panabo District, they were able to cope with their problems as they sought support from their colleagues. They realized that they do not carry the entire load of school responsibilities as male teachers, who were expected to perform better in terms of their physical strength. The support of their co-teachers unburdened them, realizing that the school program implementation is a collaborative effort among the school employees and stakeholders.



The second theme that emerged as the coping mechanism of the male teachers was on setting boundaries at the work area. The male teachers discussed that they learned to set their boundaries as they performed their daily tasks in the school. They realized that if they set their boundaries, there would be less demand from them. They also identified their strengths and weaknesses in doing school-related activities. This means that there would be fewer expectations from them on certain work demands.

The third theme that emerged as the coping mechanisms of the male teachers was taking a break from school work. By this action, the male teachers were taking their short breaks from their respective work to avoid boredom and being burned out from their school responsibilities. They made sure that they can take a short vacation to unwind and refill their enthusiasm in doing their jobs at school, considering that the male teachers in most schools were bombarded with a lot of heavy physical work that the female teachers could not perform.

There were two educational management insights drawn from the participants of this study. The first one was setting a positive school environment. The male teachers were enthusiastic as they viewed their school work to be successful if they have an ambience full of energy and camaraderie. A positive school environment means that they could freely perform their school responsibilities without hesitation.

The second insight discussed by the participants was on establishing personal connections with stakeholders. The male teachers narrated that the more they established their connections within their school area as well as with the outside stakeholders, the better their outputs of their school activities. It can be interpreted as strengthening the bond among all the interested parties in the school. The better the personal connections of the male teachers, the greater would be their accomplishments.

The findings of this study corroborate with the propositions of Spillane (2006), who claimed that a distributed type of leadership is a social distribution of leadership functions over leaders, followers, and characteristics of their situation. From a distributed standpoint, the main role of the principal is to share direction and guidance, to build follower capacity, to involve followers in the decision-making process, enabling them to take initiative, motivate followers, acknowledge followers' ability.

Future Directions

According to the study's findings, it is critical that the essential individuals for whom this research was designed appropriately communicate and use the findings.

For the principals or school heads to be more sensitive to the needs of the male intermediate teachers. The school principals may consider the strengths and weaknesses of the male teachers in assigning additional work for them.

The male intermediate teachers may be more observant of their actions and school-assigned activities. They may seek additional insights from their colleagues if deemed necessary, so that they may come up with the outputs they can possibly have in the future activities and assignments.

The learners may be directed well through the lessons conducted in the classrooms at a particular schedule as led by the male teachers is possible. The learners are encouraged to participate in class activities and share their ideas for the benefit of the group members.

For future researchers, similar studies may be conducted in other divisions or schools where the male teachers were very active in performing their assigned tasks. Such studies may further explore other areas not covered by this research.

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