



PROBING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS HANDLING MATHEMATICS IN THE NATIONAL LEARNING CAMP AND SUMMER CLASS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of fourteen elementary teachers handling mathematics in the national learning camp and summer class in three public elementary schools in Nabunturan, Division of Davao de Oro. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, analyzed via thematic analysis. The study identified five major themes: challenges in learning and teaching Math, innovative approaches in teaching Math, supporting students with varied learning levels, managing emotions in Math education, and struggles with teaching constraints and resources. Teachers used five coping mechanisms, including creative methods for enhancing student learning and fostering mastery through reinforcement and adaptation. Six insights were also highlighted for improving distance learning modality, such as building resilience in teaching practices and integrating technology and interactive content. The findings provide valuable implications for stakeholders involved in the national learning camp and summer class implementation.

KEYWORDS: National Learning Camp, Summer Class, Elementary Teachers, Mathematics, Phenomenological Inquiry, Thematic Analysis, Nabunturan, Davao De Oro

INTRODUCTION

To address the academic challenges posed by the ongoing global situation, many schools have implemented National Learning Camps and summer classes to bridge the educational gaps among students. These intensive programs and focused instructions are meant to help learners catch up. While these initiatives selfishly directed toward the recovery and use of lost instructional time seem laudable, everything throws major challenges to teachers. Workload piles up, pressure to help learners catch up increases, and, thus, creates higher levels of stress- especially in elementary educators. Though participation in the programs is technically voluntary, the availability of teachers often means that elementary teachers have no options but to enroll. It becomes more severe in smaller schools where only one teacher must handle a grade.

In Hong Kong, students' performance in the annual Mathematics summer camp showed a bleak picture in both written and oral phases. Mathematics continues to be viewed as abstract and the most challenging subject (Schoenfeld, 2022). Similarly, in Indonesia, middle school children with difficulty with Mathematics can benefit from participating in an in-person summer math camp designed to help them gain competency in mathematics, boost their interest in Mathematics, and build a growth mindset (Nitkin, Ready, and Bowers, 2022). Additionally, teachers in Laos have noticed a significant lack of mathematical proficiency among fifth-grade kids, suggesting a widespread underperformance in mathematics (Afkar et.al., 2023).

In the Philippines, teachers encounter challenges in effectively delivering mathematics instruction, especially in a summer camp environment where students often exhibit diverse learning styles and abilities. The study further highlights that those distractions, including administrative tasks and meetings, hinder teachers from non-teaching responsibilities. In the context of a summer camp, educators may grapple with additional duties like planning and organizing extracurricular activities, diverting their attention away from the core task of teaching mathematics (Coleman, 2025).

Recent observations in Nabunturan, Davao de Oro, show that students continue to have difficulties in basic mathematics. This fact became evident during the implementation of the National Learning Camps. Therefore, mathematics teachers find themselves under pressure to adapt their teaching strategies for students with a range of learning styles, competencies, and levels of prior knowledge. Teachers often need to incorporate more visual aspects, hands-on activities, and extra interventions for students to access the lessons. Limited resources, time constraints, and large numbers of learners tend to add pressure on teachers trying to implement differentiated instruction. All these areas point out the need for sustained support, in-service training, and resources for teachers-in the mathematics area, especially, where foundational skills are to be able to carry on further advancement.

With the situations cited above, the researcher has been prompted to work through a study that supports this hypothesis, explicitly discussing the experiences of volunteer teachers in



Mathematics for National Learning Camp. Hence, there is a need to research mathematics volunteer teachers' experiences working at NLC, highlighting learning content, as it is timely and necessary to consider their concerns and perceptions of existing problems towards filling the academic gap brought by the pandemic.

There were several studies about Mathematics teachers' assessment in summer camps, specifically in teaching and learning. However, no known study points out the probing experiences of elementary Mathematics teachers that carefully examine the learning recovery effort, its essence, process, and product (Bynum-Gray, 2025). Also, it is essential to note that the majority of the research has not already been done focuses on the problems that come with Mathematics summer programs, which leaves a vacuum in the knowledge of the whole range of issues that arise in the mathematics field, which already has data of struggling pupils in schools (Lynch, An, and Mancenido, 2023).

The result of this study will provide a basis for the schools to develop and improve the program, specifically from the point of view of the teachers handling the NLC and summer classes. As key facilitators of knowledge and values, teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' quest for knowledge and making sense of the nation's efforts in learning recovery. With this, schools, from the national to the local setting, will benefit from the insight of teachers, specifically mathematics teachers, on how to deal with the diversity of learners. Nationally, it will provide supplementary data as to how things are done in the local setting and thus may be used for adjustments and developments to strengthen the pursuit of national learning recovery.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of teachers in implementing the National Learning Camp (NLC) and summer classes in mathematics. This approach enabled the researcher to gather rich and meaningful accounts directly from participants in their teaching environments, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and insights. Twelve participants were selected through purposive sampling—six teachers participated in In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and another six in Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The selection criteria included being a regular public school mathematics teacher with at least three years of teaching experience and active involvement in the NLC or summer classes. The researcher performed multiple roles such as planner, interviewer, moderator, transcriber, and primary data analyst.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face and online interviews and group discussions, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Member checking was done to validate the accuracy of responses. Thematic analysis was applied to identify common patterns and core themes, with support from relevant literature and Department of Education (DepEd) guidelines. These processes allowed the researcher to capture both individual and shared experiences that shaped the teachers' engagement in the program.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed strategies such as triangulation, reflexive journaling, audit trails, and thick description. Ethical standards were strictly followed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality of information, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. These measures ensured that the research process remained rigorous, credible, and ethically sound.

RESULTS

The study explored the experiences of elementary teachers handling Mathematics in the National Learning Camp (NLC) and summer classes. From the data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, five key themes emerged regarding their experiences.

First, teachers encountered challenges in teaching and student learning, such as students struggling with basic math concepts, managing limited resources, facing learning gaps due to varying levels, absenteeism, and difficulties with memory retention. Second, they employed innovative strategies for student engagement, including collaborative teaching, creative methods, game-based learning, and using real-life objects. Third, they practiced personalized support and differentiated instruction by understanding diverse learning levels, identifying individual needs, and adapting lessons using differentiated activity sheets. Fourth, teachers described the emotional ride in teaching math, experiencing frustration, stress, empathy, patience, and fulfillment from student progress. Lastly, they faced limitations of time and human resources, struggling with inadequate preparation time, lack of volunteers, and short instructional periods.

To address these challenges, five coping mechanisms were identified. Teachers enhanced student engagement through incentives and interactive practices, such as offering snacks, using games, providing rewards, and conducting collaborative discussions. They tailored strategies for effective learning by adjusting teaching approaches, organizing lessons in small chunks, and incorporating interactive and inductive methods. They employed technology and resource-based teaching strategies, including printed materials, online resources, and educational apps. Teachers provided remediation and continuous skill reinforcement by conducting assessments, modifying lessons, and offering personalized support. They also collaborated with others by seeking guidance from master teachers, exchanging strategies, and sharing resources.

The study also highlighted several key insights shared by teachers. They emphasized the importance of individualized support, active and experiential learning, and consistent reinforcement of basic skills. Teachers recognized the need for adapting teaching to diverse learning levels, the value of collaboration with colleagues, and the role of patience and empathy in improving student learning. They also acknowledged the necessity of adequate time, resources, and manpower to implement effective mathematics instruction in NLC and summer classes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of elementary teachers in handling Mathematics instruction in the



National Learning Camp (NLC) and summer classes. Teachers observed various challenges in teaching and student learning, such as students' difficulty in grasping basic math concepts, learning gaps due to varying abilities, and absenteeism. These findings align with previous studies that recognize the struggles teachers face when teaching foundational mathematics to learners with diverse needs (Dierkx et al., 2025). Teachers also emphasized that these challenges are compounded by limited time, resources, and varying levels of student motivation, which significantly affect instructional delivery and learning outcomes. This supports earlier research that suggests targeted interventions and adaptive teaching strategies are essential for improving learning in remedial and enrichment programs (Papandreou & Tsiouli, 2022).

However, teachers also reported employing innovative strategies to engage students, including collaborative approaches, creative and game-based methods, and the use of real-life materials. These align with literature emphasizing the importance of interactive and contextualized learning in improving mathematical understanding (Hui & Mahmud, 2023). Teachers also practiced personalized support and differentiated instruction by assessing learners' abilities and adapting lessons to suit their needs, which resonates with Bruner's constructivist approach to active engagement (Bruner, 2023). In line with previous studies, they stressed the importance of meeting learners where they are academically to close learning gaps. Teachers further shared the emotional experiences of teaching math, ranging from frustration and stress to fulfillment when students showed progress. These emotional aspects highlight the need for teacher resilience and emotional support systems in educational settings (David et al., 2024).

The coping mechanisms identified in the study—such as providing incentives, tailoring teaching strategies, integrating technology, reinforcing skills, and collaborating with peers—reflect best practices in addressing instructional challenges (Cojorn, 2024). Involving varied strategies to keep students engaged supports existing research that engagement is critical to student success, particularly in remedial contexts (Davis et al., 2023). Collaboration with colleagues and seeking guidance from experienced teachers further reinforces the value of professional learning communities (Du Plessis et al., 2024). Teachers also stressed the role of continuous assessment, remediation, and targeted interventions to ensure students achieve competency, aligning with previous studies on the benefits of formative assessment in improving learning outcomes (Granberg et al., 2021).

Moreover, the study underscored several key insights from the teachers' experiences. They recognized the importance of individualized support, active learning, and patience in teaching mathematics to diverse learners, which is consistent with evidence on effective remediation programs for vulnerable students (Jacobs et al., 2025). Teachers highlighted the necessity of adequate preparation time, sufficient resources, and manpower to implement effective instruction. They also emphasized the role of collaboration and shared responsibility among educators in achieving program goals, aligning with studies on teacher well-being and professional engagement

(Ferreira, 2021). The findings suggest that for mathematics instruction in the NLC and summer classes to be more effective, teachers need targeted professional development, improved resource allocation, and sustained support from school administrators.

In conclusion, this study highlights both the successes and challenges faced by elementary teachers in delivering mathematics instruction in the NLC and summer classes. While teachers successfully employed innovative and adaptive strategies to engage students and address learning gaps, significant challenges remain, particularly in dealing with inconsistent attendance, resource limitations, and varied learning levels. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that teacher capacity and available resources influence the effectiveness of differentiated instruction (Espinosa & Guevara, 2024). The results suggest that sustained support, collaborative practices, and teacher training are essential to address these issues effectively. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies on student learning outcomes and examine ways to further strengthen instructional support for teachers in remedial and enrichment programs (Fairman et al., 2022).

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