

The Lived Experiences of Multigrade Teachers in the New Normal

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Abstract

The intention of the current study was to find out the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers in the new normal. The phenomenological research design was utilized with seven multi-grade teachers involved as research participants. These multi-grade teachers were obtained using the purposive sampling in the identified schools with multi-grade education program in the District of Malinao, Philippines. The data were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis employing Colaizzi's method. The study used semi-structured interview guide instrument in gathering the data. The themes generated were categorized into subthemes: far location, big responsibility, new environment and people, insufficient trainings and seminar, and challenging yet rewarding experience. The challenges encountered by the multigrade teachers in multi-grade classes in the new normal were classified into: lack of school facilities; lack of learning materials; construction of differentiated learning materials and assessment tools; and insufficient time. In terms of their coping mechanism on the experienced struggles in teaching multi-grade classes, the findings revealed that all teachers were extremely motivated by their positive outlook, thus, surmounted the experienced struggles in teaching multi-grade classes. Based on the result of the study, a proposed program entitled "Recovery Program for Multi-Grade Teachers Teaching in the New Normal" was created in sustaining school performance in implementing multi-grade education program.

Keywords: *Lived Experiences, Multigrade Teachers, Teaching, New Normal, Recovery Program*

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Introduction

Teaching in multi-grade classes is a form of education, which can meet the needs of many different countries as far as improving and developing teaching-learning process, eradicating illiteracy and achieving universal education are concerned because there are schools with a few students in many remote areas and border towns and even in some cities.

There are three schools in the District of Malinao that offer multi-grade education, namely: Angeles Ibardolasa Elementary School, Cogon Elementary School, and Sipac Primary School. In the normal days, the nature of these classes is in such a way that the teachers divide the time for a learning session into the number of grades in the class. In other words, a combination of two grade levels occurred in a class or two grade levels in a class under one teacher. In such cases, the teachers do not have enough opportunity for grade-to-grade training, yet, in single-grade classes, learners are the same in their grade level regardless of age and sex. Additionally, when the pandemic emerged, the teachers became more challenged in the new mode of learning.

Based on the experiences of the teachers who are teaching in the multi-grade class, they need to double their time in preparing the learning modules for the learners, the insufficient resources which can intensify the situation and in facilitating their concerns related to the modular classes in a multi- grade system. They also need to monitor the progress of the learners with equal attention for both classes in multi-grade. Their effort as teachers were doubled as well as their responsibilities.

It is in this ground that the researcher wanted to conduct the study on the lived experiences of multi-grade teachers, the challenges they have encountered in teacher multi-grade classes as well as their coping mechanism to overcome these challenges.

Methodology

Descriptive- phenomenology was used as the research design of this study. The study utilized seven multi-grade teachers as research participants. They were obtained using the purposive sampling in the three identified schools with multi-grade education program in the district of Malinao. In Angeles Ibardolasa Elementary School, there were three participants. There were also three multi-grade teachers that came from Cogon Elementary School, and one research participant was taken from Sipac Primary School.

In this study, a researcher-made interview guide was used to gather data. In addition, all questions included in the instrument was prepared by the researcher with the guidance of the research adviser.

The researcher used thematic analysis in analyzing the different answers of the participants after the focus group discussion. The verbatim responses of the participants in the FGD were interpreted by providing closest possible meaning which were categorized to formulate themes. The themes represented the perceived response to questions utilized during the FGD.

The researcher protects the participants in the conduct of research study by obtaining informed consent of the participants as well as the nature of the study, the parents that their participations was voluntary, that they may withdraw at any time without penalty; and that they may choose not to answer any question. There is honest disclosure about the purpose and intent of the research. Furthermore, the researcher respects the privacy, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivities of the participants and of their communities. All collected data is confidential and/or de-identified, unless there is a legal requirement to report this data (Standards for Ethical Practice, 2018).

Findings

The lived experiences of the Multigrade Teachers handling multi-grade classes during the New Normal were categorized into the following subthemes: challenges in the community's environment and population, insufficient trainings and seminars related to their professional growth, fulfilling call of duties and responsibilities in school and challenging yet rewarding job. Teachers experienced different challenges but these challenges helped them realize how dedicated they are in their profession.

The challenges encountered by the Multigrade Teachers teaching multi-grade classes in the New Normal were classified into the following: the location of the school is beyond the horizon, lack of school infrastructure, lack of educational resources, building differentiated learning resources and assessment resources, not enough time to create various teaching materials and students' learning difficulties in various subjects. It was observed that most of the schools in the area catering multi-grade class were far from the residences of the teachers. Most of the teachers provide for their transportation to reach their place of duty.

In terms of their coping mechanism on the experienced struggles by the teachers, the following coping mechanisms were shared: motivation to learn more and aim higher, positivity in the aspect of teaching and learning, reflection in their willingness to learn, time management in balancing different activities, contextualized learning materials and constant monitoring for learner's progress. All the teachers were extremely motivated by their positive outlook. Most of the multi-grade teachers believe they can do it with passion, positivity, and sound time management. The experiences during the new normal were tough and of they survived despite the challenges because all of them believe that they can always survive no matter how difficult life can be if you have a proper mind set with the right attitude towards achieving the goals set by the department of education.

Conclusion

Although teaching multi-grade classes was considered hard-hitting activity, on the general view, teaching multi-grade classes was considered enjoyable and rewarding teaching experience. Therefore, teaching multi-grade classes in far flung areas were still considered a fun-filled teaching experience for many.

Generally, multi-grade teachers experienced difficulties due to the demands of work while in the period of adjustment during the New Normal. The challenging responsibilities and demands on teachers handling multi-grade class require excessive strengths in doing multi-task, therefore, all the teachers experienced difficulties in delivering the basic quality education. These difficulties were also hardened due to lack of classrooms and the bulk preparation of learning materials. Therefore, handling multi-grade education was considered a difficult task. Teachers teaching multi-grade classes outshined their difficulties through positive outlook in life no matter how difficult the situation can be. Intrinsic motivation is the key in overcoming difficulties.

It is therefore recommended that Department of Education may provide sufficient funds, provide classrooms and learning facilities to make teaching and learning more effective and meaningful to sustain multi-grade teaching as the teachers will try their best to provide quality education specially in thinly populated rural areas. The Department may provide extensive trainings to the teachers specially in this New Normal learning modality.

Teachers may create innovative contextualized learning materials for the learners. Teachers perform their duties in the best way they can, but they should also prioritize their health and safety.

Lastly, to the School Administrator, in order to continuously develop the potential of teachers in terms of their teaching performance, they may conduct a monthly learning action cell session focusing on understanding the teachers' concerns, valuing their efforts, showing support and lending a hand whenever they need help are the best actions that the school administration must provide to their teachers.

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