

The Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers in Private Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of elementary teachers in private institutions are complex and unique, influenced by various factors such as the school environment, curriculum, and student demographics. These teachers often face distinct challenges and opportunities that differ from those in public schools. This phenomenological research study explored the lived experiences of the elementary teachers in the partner school private institutions of the Institute of Teacher Education. Seven (7) teachers participated and were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The data gathered were transcribed and analyzed using Moustakas' eight-step research approach. The findings reveal that the elementary teachers experienced challenges in teaching private schools, including dealing with student attitudes and behaviors, and multi-grade classes. The researchers concluded that despite the difficulties, elementary teachers remained hopeful. Their resilience and determination were evident in their unwavering commitment to their students' education.

Keywords: Elementary teachers, Lived experiences, Phenomenological study, Private institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are essential to the functioning of schools, as they are the foundation on which the school is built. Recognizing the importance of teachers' roles is crucial in comprehending the education system. Elementary school teachers play a significant role in the development of students. The early experiences of a child have a significant impact on shaping their future selves, and teachers play a crucial role in helping to uncover their potential. Due to their significant influence, teachers often develop almost parental bonds with their students.

According to Gumarang (2021), the employment of elementary school teachers in the country depends on the current state of the education sector, whether it is public or private. The requirements for obtaining a license for employment are the factor that sets private school teachers apart from public school teachers. Kennedy (2023) stated that there are different routes to landing a job at a private school, and these can depend on factors like location, experience, and the unique needs and preferences of each school. Private schools are not funded by the government, and parents have to pay for school tuition in sending their children to private schools. Tingley (2023) stated that private schools rely heavily on tuition and fundraising as they do not receive the same financial support from the government as public schools. In addition, employing oneself in a private school as an elementary school teacher is a challenge because one has to deal with the learners' behaviors, work, environment, lack of teaching resources, and the major distinction between private schools and public schools is when it comes to benefits and salaries (NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2020). Moreover, the government funds conducive learning environments for public school teachers, yet this was not the situation for teachers in private schools, where the owners must pay for their school's development on their own or seek a sponsor to help in providing instructional resources for their institutions. In that case, it will then affect the motivation of the teachers and their learning strategy in imparting the knowledge to their children.

This study was conducted in order to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers teaching in private schools, particularly the partner private schools of Tangub City Global College - Institute of Teacher Education. The researchers had identified the benefits and the challenges encountered by these teachers, who are teaching in private schools. In addition, this would help to examine the strategies that the elementary

school teachers use in coping with those challenges and the strategies. Thus, it would provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences and would cope with the challenges that they had met.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used the qualitative research method employing a phenomenological approach to get information through asking questions. It aimed to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers from private institutions. Phenomenological studies establish human experiences using the participants' descriptions. This research aimed to explain the significant experiences for each participant. This type of study is used to establish areas where there is limited knowledge (Delve, 2022). A phenomenological study, according to Good (2023), this type of research involves examining how a group of people have individually experienced a certain phenomenon or concept, such as their time teaching at private elementary schools. The goal is to gain insight into how these experiences are interpreted by the participants.

Research Participants

There are a total of seven (7) elementary teachers who teach in the two private schools, which are partner schools of Tangub City Global College. They were participants in the study. They were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) that they are elementary school teachers from private schools; 2) that they must have at least two (2) to five (5) years of teaching experience. Furthermore, data saturation was considered in relation to choosing the number of participants in this study. According to Fusch (2015), data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information is attained, and when further coding is no longer necessary.

Research Instrument

The researchers in this study have supplied an interview guide questionnaire to investigate the lived experiences of elementary teachers in private institutions. Gafner (2023) stated that interview guides are effective tools for maintaining consistency and direction during an interview. Furthermore, this interview guide, used to assess the experiences encountered among the elementary teachers in private schools and how they cope with those challenges.

Data Gathering Procedure

Permission was obtained by sending a letter of permission to the College President and to the Dean of the Institute of Teacher Education. Additionally, letters of permission were sent to the principals of the various private schools prior to the study's conduct. A face-to-face interview was conducted utilizing the interview guide. Participants were encouraged to converse openly and share stories in their own words. Questions were clear and understandable for the participants to conveniently answer during the gathering of data. The data were analyzed, transcribed, and interpreted.

Data Analysis

Using the interview guide questionnaire, the participants' responses were coded, themed, and interpreted using the Moustakas Data Analysis. Moustakas (1994) included identifying and bracketing out one's experiences and collecting data from several people who have experienced the phenomenon. This approach embraces common aspects of the human science research, such as the significance of qualitative research, a focus on the wholeness of experience, and the search for the essence of experiences, and viewing experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable subject/object relationship. In this method, it is important that the participants have experience with the phenomenon so that the researchers can connect with the participants and be able to collect accurate data for analysis. The figure that follows is the eight (8) steps of Moustakas's data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ten ethical considerations criteria (Bell & Bryman, 2007). First, the research participants were not exposed to harm. Second, the participants' dignity would consistently be given top priority. Third, the participants were fully informed and consented before the survey was conducted. Fourth, the participants' privacy was guaranteed. Fifth, the research data was provided with sufficient confidentiality. Sixth, the research participants remained anonymous. Seventh, the aims and objectives were not distorted or overstated. Eighth, all affiliations were declared. Ninth, all funding resources were uncovered. Finally, any type of misleading information, as well as representation of primary data findings in a biased way, was avoided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study used Moustakas' method to explore the lived experiences of elementary teachers in private institutions. First, each participant provided a detailed description of his or her experience teaching in a private school. The researchers utilized these descriptions and analyzed them for new meanings through themes. The study involved seven (7) selected participants from private institutions. Based on the gathered data, there are 7 themes in which the participants express their challenges faced in private school, along with their coping mechanisms.

How beneficial is it to teach in a private elementary school?

This problem discusses how beneficial it is to teach in a private elementary school. Based on the responses of the participants, the following themes are revealed. These were: (1) preparing to teach in DepEd, and (2) teaching experience.

Theme 1: Preparing to Teach in DepEd

Teaching in a private school can be beneficial for preparing for the DepEd (Department of Education) as it often offers smaller class sizes and more resources, allowing for a more personalized and focused teaching experience. York (2019) stated that enrolling in a private school system can help you progress in your career by enabling you to acquire new skills and pursue advancements in positions and promotions. Additionally, private schools may have more flexibility in curriculum and teaching methods, providing the opportunity to explore innovative approaches to education that can better align with DepEd standards. The participants express this positive outlook.

..."beneficial to the teachers to go to DepEd, because private schools are good for teachers ..." (Participant 1, Line 25-30, Transcript 1)

..."stepping stone to go to DepEd, and by that we can gain points..." (Participant 2, Line 21-24, Transcript 2)

..."beneficial to teachers to go to DepEd..." (Participant 3, Line 25, Transcript 3)

..."I think it's beneficial to teach in a private school for the preparation for DepEd..." (Participant 7, Line 23-25, Transcript 7)

The participants believed that teaching in a private school is a stepping stone towards entering DepEd and see it as a means to gain valuable experience and expertise that can benefit their future career prospects. Angla (2023) teaching private school is one of the most challenging yet rewarding careers out there. Furthermore, by demonstrating a successful track record in a private school, educators can potentially enhance their credentials and gain recognition when seeking opportunities within the DepEd system.

Teaching in a private school provides valuable experience and a strong foundation for a career in the Department of Education. It offers an opportunity to develop essential teaching skills and gain practical knowledge that will be beneficial in a challenging career in DepEd. Philips (2023) private school teacher roles frequently lack stability, yet the expertise gained can be advantageous when pursuing new opportunities like

DepEd. Furthermore, beginning your teaching career in a private school can be a crucial stepping stone towards a successful and fulfilling path in education.

Theme 2: Teaching Experience

Experiences play a crucial role in human development, fostering hope and optimism while encouraging a positive outlook on life, allowing individuals to find the silver lining in most situations. Below are the participants' statements.

..." It is beneficial for me in a way that I can be able to gain experience..." (Participant 4, Line 20-21, Transcript 4)

..." I can gain experience and I can practice my profession..." (Participant 5, line 22, Transcript 5)

..." It gave me a challenging experience, and it expanded my learning and knowledge about this kind of profession..." (Participant 6, Line 23-25, Transcript 6)

Based on the utterances mentioned, the participants can widen their knowledge in terms of their experiences while teaching in private schools. With the help of these experiences, the participants can gain insight into the real settings of the school, which has widened the knowledge of the participants through learning by doing. Moreover, Terry (2020) stated that having teaching experience in a private school will be all it takes to get a foot in the door. As it can open a new possibility and develop new knowledge in the sense of participating in the field. Therefore, knowledge brings intelligence to life (Tychkowsky, 2023).

Reflecting on one's learning during and after experiences is an essential part of the learning process. Learning comes in part from what experiences and opportunities arise for a person (Williams, 2023). Regardless of the extent to which one accumulates experience in their chosen teaching profession, it will always be beneficial to their career (Farrugia, 2023). Furthermore, as the learner engages in experiential learning, they actively pose questions, investigate, experiment, and exercise curiosity. They also work to solve problems, take on responsibility, exhibit creativity, and construct meaning. In addition, they are pushed to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the outcomes of their actions.

What are the challenges encountered by elementary school teachers teaching in private institutions?

The elementary school teachers teaching in private institutions encountered challenges in their lived experiences. After gathering the data, two main themes emerged, revealing the experiences of elementary school teachers in private institutions. There was (1) difficulty in handling multi-grade classes, and (2) the behavior of the students.

Theme 3: Difficulty in handling multi-grade classes

One of the challenges encountered by participants is the management of multigrade classes. In a multi-grade teaching method, one teacher educates students from various grade levels in the same classroom, often requiring differentiated instruction and curriculum planning to accommodate diverse learning needs. Abannag (2023), teaching multigrade classes poses challenges that could lead to teacher burnout. Furthermore, teaching multi-grade requires adept planning and differentiation to ensure that each student receives appropriate instruction and support tailored to their individual needs. Below are the participants' statements.

"...combination setup where in grade 3 and grade 4 were combined..." (Participant 2, Line 18, Transcript 2)

..." combination of classes from Grades 1 and 2..." (Participant 3, Line 17, Transcript 3)

Multi-grade class teaching is seen in many countries and perceived as a problem in all countries in which it is implemented. Some countries tried to solve the problems by developing new models in which the schools having multi-grade classes were restructured; however, this was not sufficient to overcome all the problems.

Idris (2020), teachers who have experience teaching multigrade classes possess distinct knowledge and skills that differ from those of teachers who instruct single-grade classes.

Managing multigrade classes presents a significant challenge for educators, requiring them to juggle diverse curriculum needs and teaching methods. Naparan (2021) stated that despite the limitations and challenges faced by teachers and students in this multigrade school, they worked hard and made a concerted effort to be purposeful and successful. Furthermore, finding effective strategies to address this challenge will be crucial for ensuring the success of all students within these unique learning environments.

Theme 4: Behavior of the Students

Each student possesses a unique character and way of engaging with the world, which inevitably translates into their classroom behaviors. As educators, comprehending the various student personas can make instruction more efficient, productive, and rewarding. There's a rich tapestry of student attitudes and behaviors one might encounter, and the strategies used to engage them should be equally diverse. Below are the participant statements.

..." the different attitudes of the learners, and some learners want to have special attention..." (Participant 4, Line 17-18, Transcript 4)

..." the behavior of the pupils, there are some students who won't follow instructions, and all you have to do is to be patient..." (Participant 5, Line 17-20, Transcript 5)

..." and different behaviors of the pupils..." (Participant 6, Line 17, Transcript 6)

Based on the participants' statements, there are different behaviors of the pupils inside the classroom. The teacher must deal with various attitudes exhibited by the students. To better engage with different behaviors, it is suggested that teachers adopt a dynamic classroom presence, circulating the room during discussions to ensure that all students are given equal attention. Strobel (2023) noted that teachers have the responsibility of managing student behavior to ensure that expectations and rules are clear.

The behavior of students in the classroom today is influenced by a variety of factors, including their social and cultural context (Panares, 2023). There is a wide range of behaviors and attitudes exhibited by students in the classroom, presenting a unique challenge for teachers. The behavior of students in the classroom has an impact on their individual learning results, helps to promote effective teaching methods, and contributes to the social-emotional growth of students (Herman et al., 2022).

How did you handle the challenges of teaching in a private school, and what strategies did you use to cope with them?

Despite the challenges that the elementary teachers faced, they still found the strength to overcome and cope with these challenges. Based on the responses of the participants, three (3) themes emerge, revealing the participants' coping mechanisms. There were: (1) establishing rules, (2) praying to God, and (3) being patient.

Theme 5: Establishing Rules

One of the strategies that participants implemented, especially in elementary school, was to establish rules and regulations. The participants taught good discipline to students by setting and enforcing rules in the classroom. Moreover, they recognize that rules provide structure and expectations, helping students to understand what acceptable behavior is and what is not. Cevallos (2019) stated that teachers and students should develop rules to be effective.

"...I let them know my rules and I talk to them often..." (Participant 5, Line 25, Transcript 5)

"...I think one of my strategies that I want to implement is to set rules, be bold in facing the challenges, and face it like a professional..." (Participant 6, Line 23-25, Transcript 6)

Based on the utterances, establishing rules in the classroom is important to maintain discipline and order. The teacher set rules for students to understand and follow their expectations. Moreover, the participants understood that rules promoted fairness and equal opportunities for everyone involved. Class rules are a guide for the acceptable behavior of students and allow them to know what is expected from them (Soto, 2019). The participants believe that the implementation of rules and regulations in elementary school settings has proven to be an effective strategy for fostering a positive and structured learning environment.

Implementing clear and consistent rules is an effective strategy utilized by the teacher to ensure that students comprehend and adhere to the classroom's expectations. The basis for a functional and successful classroom in any environment is established through classroom rules (McKillop, 2019). By setting explicit guidelines, the teacher establishes a structured environment that promotes understanding, accountability, and positive student behavior.

Theme 6: Praying to God

Despite all the challenges that the participants have encountered, they found strength in having faith and praying to God. They may ask God for wisdom and patience in dealing with their students, for strength and endurance in facing challenges, and for inspiration and creativity in their lesson planning. Aside from going to church, praying is known to be the second important divine service in biblical beliefs (Yilmaz, 2019). Elementary teachers believed that problems can be solved if there is a strong faith in God. The responses of participants 1, 4, and 5 supported it.

"...first place I just pray how to do it or what is the solution to that problem ..." (Participant 1, Line # 42-43, Transcript 1)

"...there is a time when I'm tired and I don't understand anything. I talk to God and ask for his guidance and peace of mind...." (Participant 4, Line # 29-32, Transcript 4)

"...I just pray for everything, like there is a student who is stubborn, I just pray..." (Participant 5, Line # 28-30, Transcript 5)

The participants revealed that praying was one of their ways to cope with the challenges in teaching private school. The participants seek God especially in their daily work through intercession, believing that their profession is not just a job, but a calling. Moreover, they recognize the importance of relying on a higher power for strength, wisdom, and guidance in fulfilling their role as educators. A simple prayer can bring peace to a person, leading them on a path to healing and giving them the ability to overcome life's challenges (Levy, 2023). Despite the various obstacles faced, the participants discovered solace and resilience through their unwavering faith and devotion to prayer.

The teacher's reliance on prayer as a coping mechanism exemplifies the powerful impact of personal faith in navigating the challenges faced in teaching within a private school setting. Prayer in difficult times is a transformative practice that connects us with God (Ukaegbu, 2022). By seeking solace and guidance through prayer, the teacher was able to find strength and resilience amidst the various obstacles encountered in their profession.

Theme 7: Being Patient

The teachers remained patient, understanding that the process of learning takes time and perseverance. Her unwavering patience allowed her to continue guiding her students towards success, even in the face of adversity. In the field of education, patience was considered one of the most important virtues to have (Borkala, 2022). The participant expresses this positive outlook.

"... keep fighting..." (Participant 2, Line 36, Transcript 1)

"...I need to be patient enough to face the challenges and solve them right away..." (Participant 6, Line 28-29, Transcript 6)

The participants revealed that although the challenges in teaching can be daunting, it is essential to be patient or persevere. The challenges faced by teachers can sometimes be overwhelming, leaving them exhausted and questioning their decision to pursue this noble path. However, teachers must keep fighting, even when the going gets tough, as the rewards of teaching far outweigh the difficulties. According to Anguilo (2019), it stated that challenges aren't easy, but they can be overcome. It will be tough, but it will be worth it.

The teachers' unwavering patience and perseverance in their teaching efforts played a crucial role in ensuring their students' understanding and growth. It is important to be patient and keep going to reach your goals (Ward, 2021). The dedication and commitment undoubtedly made a lasting impact on their students' education and overall development.

Essence: The experiences of elementary teachers in private schools were both challenging and rewarding; they saw them as an opportunity to make a significant impact on students' lives and as well as in education.

The lived experiences of elementary teachers in private institutions could be both challenging and fulfilling. Elementary teachers in private institutions played a vital role in shaping young minds, yet their profession was not without challenges. This essay aimed to highlight the various hurdles these teachers encountered, including multigrade classes, dealing with students' attitudes and behaviors. Despite all the challenges they faced, elementary teachers in private institutions never lost hope. They draw strength and inspiration from their faith in God, finding solace and guidance from the Almighty. The unwavering dedication of these educators deserved recognition.

CONCLUSION

This study on "The Lived Experiences of Elementary Teachers in Private Institutions" aimed to explore the lived experiences of elementary teachers in private schools. This study employed a phenomenological research approach with the interview guide questionnaire as the instrument used in data gathering. Thereafter, the data gathered were analyzed with the use of Moustakas' Research Approach. The participants of this study were the seven (7) selected elementary teachers who have experience teaching in private institutions. The researchers used an interview guide questionnaire to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers in private institutions.

After analyzing the gathered data, it was evident that elementary school teachers in private institutions have both positive and negative experiences. The analysis revealed two main themes that reflected the participants' experiences: (1) difficulty in handling multi-grade classes, and (2) the behavior of the students. Despite the challenges they faced, elementary school teachers have developed coping mechanisms that allowed them to turn these difficulties into opportunities to provide their students with a better education. Driven by their passion and unwavering commitment, these teachers strove to achieve their teaching goals and ensure their students received the best possible education. The researchers concluded that teaching in a private elementary school is a formidable challenge for elementary teachers, as it is not a simple task. They have met different difficulties and challenges in teaching in a private school. However, despite the negative experiences they encountered, they overcame those problems by creating a variety of coping mechanisms. Despite difficulties, participants still found opportunities and the courage to give their students a better education.

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