

Lived Experiences of Teachers with Multiple Ancillary Functions: A Phenomenological Study

Sherlyn Bajenting Narsolis

Graduate School – Educational Management, Holy Cross of Davao College, Davao City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to describe the journey of teachers with multiple ancillary functions. Specifically, it aimed to describe the challenges they encountered, explore their coping mechanisms, and gather learning insights from their experiences. A qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach was utilized, and purposive sampling was used to identify the 10 elementary teacher-participants from the Division of Davao City, Philippines. Informed consent was accomplished to ensure ethical standards, and data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion with the aid of an interview guide. The interviews were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring ideas and emerging themes across the participants' responses. Results revealed that the participants encountered challenges focused on being burdened with excessive workload, encountering work-life imbalance, feeling dissatisfied and guilty, facing unhealthy relationships with colleagues, and worrying about student learning. Further, the study showed that teachers made use of strategizing activities, seeking assistance from family members, and keeping personal values in coping with the hurdles they experienced. The findings also revealed that despite the difficulties associated with multiple ancillary functions, the participants developed important realizations from their experiences. They emphasized the value of being good to family members, effectively budgeting time, keeping personal values when enduring difficulties, ignoring colleagues who refuse to help, and maintaining teacher presence during classroom instruction. These insights reflected how teachers adjusted personally and professionally while handling multiple responsibilities. Hence, it is recommended that the Department of Education look into this existing situation and consider appropriate measures that may help reduce the burden of multiple ancillary functions, protect teachers' instructional time, and support their effectiveness in carrying out both teaching and additional school responsibilities.

Keywords: multiple ancillary functions, teacher workload, work-life balance, elementary teachers, phenomenological study

INTRODUCTION

Public school teachers are expected to provide consistent, high-quality classroom instruction while also contributing to the broader operation of their schools. In the Philippine public-school context, these additional responsibilities may include coordinators for academic and non-academic programs, committee assignments, coaching, school-based management activities, reporting requirements, and participation in district or division initiatives. The dissertation on which this article is based identified the simultaneous performance of classroom teaching and multiple ancillary functions as a continuing source of concern because teachers may be required to divide their attention between instruction and tasks that are administrative, organizational, or program-related in nature.

The pressure created by multiple roles is not unique to one locality. Tancinco (2016) described teachers as burdened by responsibilities beyond their teaching load, while Australian Education Union (2019) and Education Support (2018) similarly highlighted workload, paperwork, and administrative demands as concerns affecting teachers. Multitasking may allow people to shift among several responsibilities, but it can also reduce efficiency and performance when tasks compete for attention (Baran, 2013; Lee & Taatgen, 2002). Howard and Johnson (2004) further linked teacher stress and burnout with demanding work conditions. In practice, the problem

becomes especially important when the time and attention required by ancillary functions compete directly with preparation, classroom instruction, assessment, and student supervision.

Within the Philippines, Alquizar (2018) described multitasking among teachers as an increasingly visible workplace reality. Into (2018), in a phenomenological study of teachers with multiple ancillary functions, reported both difficult and constructive experiences: participants encountered substantial demands but also described endurance, perseverance, risk-taking, and determination. The present study extended this line of inquiry to public elementary teachers in Davao City, where the nature of classroom responsibility differs from that of secondary teaching and where limited qualitative research had documented in detail how multiple ancillary functions were experienced across professional and personal domains.

The consequences of competing responsibilities may extend beyond workload. Administrative overload can reduce the time available for nurturing relationships with students and preparing for instruction (Madigan, 2019). Work demands may also intrude on family life and personal time, contributing to work-life imbalance (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2002). At the same time, ancillary assignments may provide opportunities for professional learning, confidence, and growth when teachers perceive the responsibilities as meaningful and manageable (Sappa, Boldrini, & Aprea, 2015). These contrasting possibilities make it important to examine teachers' experiences in their own words rather than assuming that additional responsibilities are uniformly harmful or beneficial.

Accordingly, the study sought to document the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers who simultaneously served as classroom teachers and performed multiple ancillary functions. It addressed three objectives: (1) to describe the lived challenges of teachers with multiple ancillary functions; (2) to explore the coping mechanisms they used in responding to these challenges; and (3) to gather the learning insights they developed from their experiences. The focus was not simply on the number of tasks teachers performed, but on how these responsibilities shaped instructional work, relationships, family life, coping, and professional meaning.

Theoretical Lens

The study was primarily anchored in Person-Environment Fit Theory, which proposes that work-related stress can arise when the demands of the work environment do not adequately match an individual's abilities, resources, or needs (Parham & Gordon, 2011). This perspective was relevant because teachers with multiple ancillary functions were required to respond to competing instructional and non-instructional demands within finite time and personal resources.

Expectancy Theory was also used to understand how teachers may continue exerting effort when they believe that additional work can lead to valued outcomes such as recognition, professional growth, or promotion (Mulder, 2018). Finally, the dissertation drew on a burnout perspective discussed by Tancinco (2016), emphasizing that sustained emotional and physical overload can weaken job performance and reduce the energy available for teaching. Together, these lenses provided a framework for interpreting both the strain associated with multiple functions and the motivation, resilience, and perceived growth reported by participants.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design. Qualitative inquiry was appropriate because the research sought to understand how teachers interpreted and gave meaning to their experiences in their natural work settings (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive phenomenology was selected to focus on the participants' perceptions, feelings, challenges, coping mechanisms, and learning insights as people who had directly experienced the phenomenon of performing multiple ancillary functions while remaining responsible for classroom teaching.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted in the Division of Davao City. Ten public elementary school teachers from different districts were selected through purposive sampling. Consistent with the criteria established in the dissertation, participants were classroom teachers who also coordinated at least two Department of Education programs at school or district level and/or coached academic or sports activities. They had rendered at least three years of service, were at least 28 years old, and had been appointed or designated to their current ancillary functions for not less than three years. The sample size was within the range commonly used in phenomenological studies as discussed by Creswell (1998). Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to identify participants who had direct and sustained experience of the phenomenon (Crossman, 2018).

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview guide was developed around the three research objectives: challenges, coping mechanisms, and learning insights. The questions were informed by prior observation and informal interactions with teachers performing ancillary functions. To strengthen the appropriateness of the instrument, the interview guide was presented to a group of experts, and their comments and suggestions were incorporated. The dissertation treated this validation process as a means of improving the plausibility, credibility, and trustworthiness of the questions used to elicit participants' experiences (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008).

Data Collection

Permission to conduct the study was sought through the Graduate School of Holy Cross of Davao College and subsequently from the Schools Division Superintendent, Public Schools District Supervisors, and the concerned school principals. Selected teachers were then invited to participate. Participants were allowed to choose interview times and places that were reasonably convenient for them so that the research would not unnecessarily interfere with their teaching responsibilities.

The researcher personally conducted the in-depth interviews. A focus group discussion was also conducted for triangulation and was facilitated by another interviewer to help countercheck the data and reduce the possibility that a single interviewer's influence would dominate both sources of evidence. Interviews and the focus group discussion were audio-recorded with appropriate participant consent and transcribed verbatim. Participants were given copies of their transcriptions for verification, supporting member checking and the accurate representation of their accounts (Glesne, 2011).

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-interpretive thematic process. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and lines were numbered to facilitate the identification and retrieval of specific responses. The researcher coded the transcripts by identifying recurring topics, issues, similarities, and differences across participants' narratives. Redundant or ambiguous statements were reviewed so that clear and meaningful concepts could be retained. Codes were then grouped into a smaller number of categories and themes that represented multiple participant perspectives, with direct quotations used to support interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Sutton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

The study addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member checking. Transferability was strengthened through detailed description of the participants, context, and research process so readers could judge the relevance of the findings to other settings. Dependability was addressed by documenting procedures and maintaining consistency between the design and the analytic process. Confirmability was supported by grounding interpretations in participants' data rather than the researcher's preferences and by retaining notes and documentation related to decisions made during the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Connelly, 2016; Devault, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary. Before data collection, participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Signed informed consent was obtained. Confidentiality was maintained by restricting access to identifying information and by excluding identifying details from the reporting of findings. The dissertation also emphasized anonymity in the presentation of participants, schools, contact information, and combinations of demographic details that could enable identification. These procedures reflected the principles of informed participation, privacy, fairness, and respect discussed in the study (Silverman, 2000; Smith, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion produced three broad areas of findings: challenges experienced by teachers with multiple ancillary functions, coping mechanisms used to manage those challenges, and learning insights developed from the experience. English translations are presented for quotations that were originally expressed partly or wholly in Cebuano or Filipino. Participant codes from the dissertation are retained to preserve the connection between the reported theme and the original transcript.

Challenges of Teachers with Multiple Ancillary Functions

Table 1. Themes and subthemes on the challenges of teachers with multiple ancillary functions

Theme	Subthemes / Description
Being burdened with excessive workload	Accomplishing overwhelming paperwork; suffering from time-consuming administrative tasks
Encountering personal-work imbalance	Losing family time; wasting instructional time
Feeling dissatisfied and guilty	Dissatisfaction and guilt associated with reduced classroom presence and instructional quality
Facing unhealthy relationships with colleagues	Feeling disappointed when denied help
Worrying about student learning	Rendering inconsistent quality of classroom teaching; enduring student misbehavior; managing the classroom ineffectively

Being Burdened with Excessive Workload

The first major challenge was excessive workload, expressed through overwhelming paperwork and time-consuming administrative tasks. Participants described repeated reporting requirements, preparation of means of verification, attendance at meetings, coordination of programs and events, and other responsibilities that competed with lesson preparation and classroom teaching. This finding was consistent with the dissertation's review of literature describing paperwork and administrative overload as major sources of teacher strain (Education Support, 2018; Madigan, 2019; Tancinco, 2016).

A participant summarized the competition between reports and teaching: "Because reports are needed every day or almost every day, you don't have much time to prepare for your class... you cannot spend more time preparing lessons for your students or learners because you are focused to the reports asked by the principal or by the district coordinator of your ancillary works" (P9Q1L3). The concern was therefore not merely that teachers had many tasks; rather, several tasks were time-sensitive and were experienced as taking priority over classroom preparation.

Encountering Personal-Work Imbalance

The second challenge concerned imbalance between personal and professional responsibilities. Participants

described losing family time and extending work into evenings, weekends, and periods that would otherwise have been devoted to rest or family activities. Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2002) emphasized that work-family balance is associated with quality of life, while the dissertation also drew on Kohl (2016) to explain how sustained imbalance may contribute to stress and burnout.

One participant stated, “It is not really balanced at all. As if I have more time for my ancillary works than my personal life. I feel bad and sad that I cannot anymore attend to my children” (P6Q2L3). Others described completing school-related work after family members had gone to sleep or sacrificing planned family activities because of school events. The accounts show that the effects of ancillary work extended beyond school hours and were experienced as a redistribution of time away from personal life.

Feeling Dissatisfied and Guilty

A third theme was dissatisfaction and guilt, particularly when official responsibilities required teachers to leave their classes or reduced the quality of instruction they believed they should provide. The participants did not generally describe indifference toward their teaching role; instead, their dissatisfaction emerged precisely because they valued teaching and felt they were not always able to meet their own standards. This is consistent with literature in the dissertation linking job satisfaction with workload, working conditions, and classroom difficulties (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005; Song & Alpaslan, 2015).

Participant 1 explained: “If we have ancillary tasks and we really need to attend there, the learners will be left alone. That is the most difficult thing... I feel guilty because I always want them to learn but they learn nothing” (P1Q1L3). Participant 5 similarly described occasions when pupils were asked to copy notes or complete work without sufficient explanation because the teacher had to attend to another activity. These accounts position guilt as an emotional consequence of role conflict rather than simply a reaction to being busy.

Facing Unhealthy Relationships with Colleagues

The fourth challenge involved strained relationships with colleagues, especially when coordinators needed assistance but perceived that other teachers were unwilling to help. Participants described disappointment, self-pity, frustration, and in some cases conflict arising from the belief that the coordinator was expected to carry most of the responsibility. The dissertation linked these experiences with literature on professional relationships and the need to address workplace disagreements constructively (Clark, 2014; Lucas, 2020).

Participant 2 observed that even after providing materials and support, “there are teachers... [from whom] still you get no support. They are not supportive. Hence, coordinators have to work harder” (P2Q1L6). Another participant characterized busy periods as a “one-woman show.” The theme indicates that workload was affected not only by the formal number of assignments but also by whether tasks could be shared effectively within the school community.

Worrying about Student Learning

The fifth challenge centered on student learning and was expressed through three subthemes: inconsistent quality of classroom teaching, student misbehavior, and ineffective classroom management. Participants repeatedly connected official absence, interrupted lessons, and reduced preparation time with concern that learners were receiving less consistent instruction. This concern aligns with the dissertation’s discussion of the central role of teachers in educational quality (Gwambombo, 2013; Mosha, 2004).

Participant 6 stated that when an urgent responsibility occurred, the teacher might give a short explanation and move directly to an activity because “Ma’am” was busy, concluding that “the quality of learning” was reduced (P6Q1L3). Participant 1 also described incidents in which learners fought or were injured while the teacher was away, saying that it was “very difficult if the teacher is not around in the classroom” (P1Q1L3). The findings are consistent with Aldrup (2018), who identified student misbehavior as a stressful aspect of teaching, and with the dissertation’s emphasis on consistent teacher presence and classroom management (Alstad, 2019).

Coping Mechanisms of Teachers with Multiple Ancillary Functions

Table 2. Themes and subthemes on coping mechanisms

Theme	Subthemes / Description
Strategizing activities	Setting priorities; observing better time management
Seeking assistance from family members	Practical, emotional, and material support from family
Keeping personal values	Being optimistic; being persevering and flexible

Strategizing Activities

Participants responded to competing demands by deliberately strategizing their activities. Two recurring strategies were setting priorities and attempting to manage time more effectively. Teachers described planning ahead, completing tasks during less busy periods, breaking responsibilities into smaller steps, and deciding which requirements were most urgent. The dissertation connected these strategies with literature emphasizing the importance of organization and time management in teaching (Kashyap, 2019; Risky, 2018).

Participant 2 described the approach as “time management and a matter of balancing everything,” adding that lessons missed because of other responsibilities still had to be revisited so required competencies could be addressed (P2Q2L2). Other participants used written to-do lists or prepared school-program materials during vacation periods when possible. At the same time, some acknowledged that prioritizing “urgent” ancillary requirements could still result in teaching receiving less immediate attention, showing that time management reduced but did not eliminate structural conflicts between roles.

Seeking Assistance from Family Members

Family members formed an important support system. Participants described spouses and relatives helping with household responsibilities, school-related preparation, classroom repairs, transport, and in some cases financial needs associated with school activities. This support made it easier to continue performing demanding roles. The finding is consistent with King et al. (1995), who discussed family support in relation to employees’ work demands, and with Jain and Nair (2015), who examined the interaction between work and family resources.

Participant 8 said, “I feel lucky that my husband understands me. In fact, he helps me in all my needs in school” (P8FQ2L1). Another participant described family members proceeding with planned activities without her while continuing to understand her work obligations. The participants’ narratives suggest that coping was not entirely individual; it was often made possible by practical and emotional support outside the school.

Keeping Personal Values

The third coping mechanism was the use of personal values, particularly optimism, perseverance, and flexibility. Participants described accepting difficult assignments, trying to remain positive, adapting to sudden meetings or urgent requests, and continuing to work despite fatigue. The dissertation related these responses to the role of personal values in shaping workplace decisions and attitudes (Mashlah, 2015) and to perseverance and resilience in difficult circumstances (Pickford, 2017).

Participant 10 stated, “As teachers, we just have to be strong and be positive. No matter how busy we get, just go with the flow; every good thing or bad thing, it will just pass” (P10Q2L1). Participant 8 similarly said teachers needed to be ready and flexible “in order to survive in this profession” (P8Q2L1). These coping strategies helped teachers continue functioning, although the findings also suggest that individual resilience should not be treated as a substitute for addressing excessive or poorly distributed workload.

Learning Insights of Teachers with Multiple Ancillary Functions

Table 3. Learning insights generated from participants’ experiences

Theme	Subthemes / Description
Family relationships	Being good to and valuing family members who provide support
Time	Effective budgeting of time helps ease excessive workload
Personal values	Keeping personal values is necessary to endure difficulties
Colleague relationships	Avoiding unproductive conflict can prevent repeated disappointment
Classroom presence	Teacher presence during instruction is significant in addressing student misbehavior and supporting learning

Being Good to Family Members Is Important

Participants' first learning insight was the importance of valuing family members who consistently provided practical and emotional support. The experience of receiving help during demanding periods strengthened their appreciation of family relationships. The dissertation connected this insight with discussions of supportive family relationships and teamwork (Raina, 2019; Raisingchildren.net.au, 2018).

Effective Budgeting of Time Helps Ease Excessive Workload

Participants also concluded that deliberate budgeting of time could ease, although not completely remove, the burden of multiple responsibilities. Planning ahead, identifying busy periods, and preparing required materials in advance were viewed as ways to reduce pressure. One participant advised other teachers to focus on "time management," resourcefulness, and strength, while remembering that difficult experiences could also contribute to professional growth (P3Q3L1).

Keeping Personal Values Is Necessary to Endure Difficulties

A further learning insight concerned commitment and personal values. Participants described teaching as work that required dedication beyond simple task completion. One participant summarized this view by saying, "Being a teacher is not about earning money, but it is a ministry" (P1Q3L2). The study interpreted such statements as evidence that commitment, optimism, perseverance, and flexibility helped participants endure difficulties and continue serving their learners.

Managing Unproductive Conflict Can Protect Well-Being

Participants learned to avoid allowing repeated disappointments with colleagues to dominate their emotional energy. Some described "ignoring" colleagues who refused to help and focusing instead on completing assigned work. Participant 1 said, "I just ignore them. I do my tasks assigned to me and if I need their help, I just ask them. If they refuse, there's nothing I can do... rather than I will let them affect me" (P1Q2L6). This finding should be understood as a participant-derived coping insight, not as an argument that workplace conflict should remain unaddressed; the dissertation also emphasized calm communication and constructive resolution of disagreements.

Teacher Presence during Classroom Instruction Is Significant

Finally, participants consistently emphasized the importance of teacher presence during instructional time. Their experiences of interrupted lessons, seatwork completed without sufficient guidance, learner misbehavior, and safety concerns reinforced the belief that classroom presence is central to both instruction and behavior management. Participant 5 expressed this concern directly when asking, in effect, whether teachers could still teach adequately when they were required to complete so many other tasks, and recommended reducing workload related to paperwork and reports (FGDP5Q1L9). This insight brings the study back to its central concern: ancillary functions may be necessary for school operations, but they should not routinely displace the teacher's core instructional role.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings suggest that the distribution and management of ancillary functions should be reviewed with the protection of instructional time as a central consideration. Participants did not reject all additional responsibilities; rather, they described difficulty when several duties accumulated, required urgent compliance, or removed them from the classroom. The Department of Education and school leaders may therefore consider whether reporting requirements, program coordination, committee assignments, and event-related work can be simplified, scheduled outside core instructional periods, supported by administrative personnel, or distributed more evenly across staff.

School supervisors and principals may also consider the relational consequences of workload distribution. Where coordinators depend on colleagues for implementation, clear role definitions, shared responsibility, and realistic timelines may reduce conflict and the perception that one teacher must carry an entire program. At the same time, support for time management and planning can help teachers organize responsibilities, but individual coping strategies should complement rather than replace organizational measures.

The study further highlights the importance of maintaining teacher presence in the classroom. Participants associated absence or divided attention with less consistent instruction, weaker classroom management, and student misbehavior. When attendance at official activities is unavoidable, schools may need procedures that protect learner supervision and continuity of instruction. The dissertation recommended the use of substitute arrangements when necessary and emphasized that the welfare and learning of students should remain the primary consideration.

For future research, the original dissertation recommended conducting similar studies with a larger and more diverse group of teachers and schools. Comparative work across districts, school levels, and regions could help determine which experiences are common across contexts and which are specific to particular organizational arrangements. Additional studies could also examine how changes in administrative support, workload policy, or digital reporting systems influence the balance between teaching and ancillary responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study showed that teachers with multiple ancillary functions experienced a complex combination of professional strain, personal sacrifice, coping, and learning. The most prominent challenges were excessive workload, personal-work imbalance, dissatisfaction and guilt, strained relationships with colleagues, and concern about student learning. These experiences were not isolated from classroom practice; participants repeatedly described how paperwork, meetings, coordination duties, and official absences competed with lesson preparation, instructional time, supervision, and classroom management.

Teachers responded through prioritization, time management, family support, optimism, perseverance, and flexibility. They also developed learning insights that emphasized the importance of family relationships, careful use of time, personal values, emotional management of workplace conflict, and teacher presence during instruction. The findings therefore point to a dual responsibility: teachers need practical coping strategies, but schools and education systems also need workload structures that allow teachers to perform ancillary functions without undermining their primary role as classroom educators. A more systematic and equitable distribution of non-instructional duties may help protect both teacher well-being and the quality of student learning.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval procedures documented in the dissertation included permission from the Dean of the Graduate School of Holy Cross of Davao College and the Schools Division Superintendent, followed by permissions from the relevant Public Schools District Supervisors and school principals. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout data collection, transcription, analysis, and reporting.

Conflict Of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The interview and focus group discussion transcripts are not publicly available because the study involved confidential qualitative accounts and the research procedures emphasized protection of participant identity. De-identified excerpts that support the reported themes are included in this article.

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