

PRIVATE TO PUBLIC: EXPERIENCES OF FIRST TIME TEACHERS IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers enter the education profession and are attracted to teaching as a career because of what they view as the role of the teacher. This research study, I used qualitative research design using phenomenological inquiry which was exploratory in nature; for the facets of information that were derived are fluid, subjective and taken from the experiences and perspectives of the participants which would be most suitable for exploratory study. In obtaining data about how the participants think and feel in the most direct ways, I have conducted in-depth one-on-one interviewing, direct participant observation, and focus group discussions. The results revealed three themes that emerged regarding the lived experiences of teachers in their first-year in public schools. The themes that were generated include the following: burdensome workloads, work stress, and disconnect exist. Moreover, there were two themes that were generated regarding how the participants shape their image in the public school based on their experiences, namely: love of the profession and building a rewarding career. Furthermore, with all of the challenges and difficulties of teachers, some realizations were generated which enables them to survive in the new environment such as learn to adapt, and being resilient.

Keywords: education, private, public, experiences, first-time teachers, phenomenology, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Teachers enter the education profession and are attracted to teaching as a career because of what they view as the role of the teacher (Anhorn, 2008). Culross (2007) stated that teachers are motivated to stay in the teaching profession because of their

love for continuous learning and teaching. Educators experience contentment in their role as a teacher because of the compassion they have for teaching students and the subject matter (Loui, 2006). To further practice professionally, many teachers from private schools often attracted to apply for job placement in the government with the dream of having better professional experience aside from its stability and higher salary.

However, to get a job as teacher in the government institution doesn't always reflect to a better work experience. As they come to know themselves as teachers in public school, they wrestle with a variety of emotional and psychological and even existential issues (Cook, 2009). Because how teachers teach is in direct dialogue with who they are and where they teach, many beginning teachers in the United States find themselves simultaneously working on struggling to change who they are in the context of what they do (Intrator, 2006). Murshidi, Konting, Elias, and Fooi (2006) stated that "when beginning teachers enter the teaching force, they often encounter a reality shock as they confront the complexity of the teaching task. The reality of the actual teaching situation sometimes differs so much from what the beginners were expecting" (p. 266). When a teacher teaches first time in the new environment, they usually figure out how to survive the classroom challenges and the daily interactions with administrators, colleagues, and parents (Amoroso, 2005). When new teachers arrive into the classroom, a harsh reality occurs because they had unrealistic expectations of the teaching (Lundeen, 2004).

In the Philippine situation, many first time public school teachers have developed frustrations and difficulties even from the start of getting their job placement like the application process, most of them have experienced hardships in getting their appointment for permanent teaching positions in the government (Tolentino, 2016). Nevertheless, those teachers who already made their appointment in DepEd are still not assured of better well-being at work. In fact, the teachers who are sincere in giving quality education to Filipino children and the youth have to be creative to be able to cope because of government neglect ev if they have been spending their salaries for the materials that should be provided by the government (Umil, 2014). Test papers, electric fans, materials needed to decorate the classrooms are only few of the basic needs that are not being provided. Hence, the burden is being passed on to the teachers. The teachers, on the other hand, are forced to ask contributions from the parents because they can't do it alone (Umil, 2014).

Most of the studies related to struggles of teachers in Department of Education are focus on job placement (Tolentino, 2016), classroom needs (Umil, 2014), and governance (Navaro, 2012). However, there is no study conducted that focus on the travails of teachers from private school who have joined and landed first time in the public schools. With this scenario, this study can give documentations on the experiences of teachers which can be beneficial among leaders and policy makers as basis for the improvement of services and work-life satisfaction among its subordinates.

METHOD

In this research study, I used qualitative research design using phenomenological inquiry which was exploratory in nature; for the facets of information that were derived are fluid, subjective and taken from the experiences and perspectives of the participants which would be most suitable for exploratory study. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, I utilized an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation included the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change.

The phenomenological method interprets an experience or fact, by listening to the different stories of the participants. It describes the structures of experience as they present themselves to consciousness, without recourse to theory, deduction, or assumption from other disciplines. The method examined the phenomena through the subjective eyes of the participants that describe the meaning of the experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007).

This endeavour explored the challenges of participants from a population who considered education as an essential motivator towards development of oneself and the nation, only to find out that they would be experiencing difficulties in their service in the public schools.

I personally gathered data and conduct in-depth interviews with

10 informants and 7 participants for the Focus Group Discussion in different places based on the agreement among the informants, focusing on the difficult experiences they underwent in their first year as educators in the public school. I recorded the interviews through the use of two audio-digital recording devices. After conducting the interview, the recorded conversations were transcribed by a hired transcriber. After which, transcripts were translated by the researcher and an English teacher. Moreover, I together with two independent reader - analyst have analyze the data from the audio recordings to cross-validate the findings of the transcriptions and English translations, and employed the expertise of a professional data analyst for the interpretation of the tabulated data, wherein the themes were extracted out and became the basis in the formation of personal insights.

In the identification of my research informants, they were co-teacher or colleague whom I chose initially through purposive sampling as my participants based on a pre-selected criterion relevant to my study (Tongco, 2007), who had struggled with their first-year in public schools, and with previous experience in the private academic institutions.

Purposive sampling was especially exemplified through the key informant technique wherein one or a few individuals were solicited to act as guides to a culture (Tongco, 2007). I used referral system so that I could access to teachers who would qualify my criteria. This referral system is also called as snowball sampling. The snowball sampling is a non-probability based sampling technique that can be used to gain access to such populations. The informants were purposely initially chosen so that the information needed could expedite the study, however, the application of snowball sampling later would be appropriate to gather the exact data needed to answer the research questions posted in the earlier part of this paper.

In obtaining data about how the participants think and feel in the most direct ways, I have conducted in-depth one-on-one interviewing, direct participant observation, and focus group discussions. This method, in fact, is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: The participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it not as the researcher views it. The interviewing would have limitations and weaknesses, and involve personal interaction; where cooperation is essential (Cresswell, 2007).

In this study, I used informed consent form with introductory script detailing specifically to the participants the purpose of the study, what the study involve, why they were asked to take part, that their participation shall be voluntary, and confidential and their identification in the study would be anonymous, what will happen to the information they would give, what would happen to the results, what would be the possible disadvantages in taking part and the contact numbers of the researcher. In addition, wherever possible, the interviews were conducted in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that were most suitable for the study participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008).

Referential adequacy was used to establish the issue of trustworthiness and credibility in my study. Raw data, observation guide, digital audio recordings and transcription were utilized. Persistent observations, triangulation, peer debriefing, participant member checking, and reflexivity procedures will be used to test the strength of the instrument that measured the phenomena under study and qualify findings as accurately as possible representing the data in discernable and meaningful ways were employed. Trustworthiness and quality will be observed in the study which will be established by addressing the following components: credibility in preference to internal validity, confirm ability in preference to objectivity, transferability in preference to external validity or generability, and dependability in preference to reliability.

A thematic analysis was performed to analyze the transcribed data from interviews. A review and analysis of the data took place to identify common themes and patterns that emerged from the conversations of interviewees. To examine the data, a Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam method and a manual process were employed. In the manual process, extrapolating and analyzing the data from the interviews involved coding and categorizing words and phrases into their respective themes and patterns (Moustakas). Construction of themes and patterns that emerged from the data through transcription of digital recordings occurred. By presenting the qualitative phenomenological data in such a way, a more thorough comprehension of the problem under examination transpired. The results added to the existing body of literature and reflection of the findings could assist educational leaders in providing provisional recommendations (Moustakas, 1994).

Analysis of the data allowed for meaningful themes and patterns. Organization of the data occurred in categories. Connections among the categories uncovered common themes and patterns.

Through the deconstruction of recorded interviews, reconstruction of the data pieces into meaningful data categories and patterns occurred to find common patterns (Moustakas, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Core themes and patterns were developed by thoroughly examining the transcripts to discover the lived experiences and perceptions of participants in this study. Developing themes from the data consisted of answering the research questions and framing a deep explanation of the phenomenon of the lived experiences of first-year public school teachers.

Lived Experiences of Teachers

Table 1 presents the three themes that emerged regarding the lived experiences of teachers in their first-year in public schools. The themes that were generated include the following: burdensome workloads, work stress, and disconnect exist between expectation and actual scenario.

Table 1
Emerging Themes from the Lived Experiences of First Time Public School Teachers

Theme and Pattern	Description
Burdensome workloads	Too much teaching assignments and also the tasks after the regular teaching load
Work Stress	Results from the pressure in the workplace
Disconnect Exist between expectation and actual scenario	Misalignment between the expectations and realities of classroom teaching

Burdensome Workloads. The new teachers are expected to perform many tasks than the old teachers. This is evident in the teaching assignments given to first-year teachers. Most of the participants shared that new teachers were given the most difficult teaching assignments with more preparations, and are assigned to handle extracurricular activities such as coaching. Majority of them revealed that they have more vacant time when they were in the private school because their teaching loads are controlled to maintain efficiency. Among the transcripts include the following:

I have been given a lot of teaching loads as compared to old teachers who only have few loads and assignments. Too much task given to

me affects my efficiency and effectiveness as a teacher since I only have less time to prepare with my lessons (Participant 5)

My subject preparation is too much that I cannot do other things to improve my methods, but instead I opted to study my next lessons in another subject (Participant 1)

I was given coaching functions aside from my teaching loads. This extracurricular assignment interferes and consumes most of my free time (Participant 2).

Given such workloads and preparations, they have to work overtime to prepare the materials and lessons for their students. Moreover, their hardships are even extended at home since they have to check the quizzes and test papers, compute the grades, and update their class records regularly. Most of them believe that they have sacrificed their personal time just to prepare for the next day's teaching. Some of the interview replies include:

My work consume a lot of my personal time. I usually used my free time by checking the quizzes and making grades of my students (Participant 4) I bring my work at home just to meet the deadline. I need to ensure to finish the checking of quizzes and test papers to have an early evaluation of my students (Participant 3)

Consistent with the literature, participants believed high attrition rates of new teachers occurs because typically, new teachers are given the most difficult teaching assignments, receive little support, are expected to coach extracurricular activities, are assigned to disadvantaged schools, and have more classes to prepare for than experienced teachers (Kinsey, 2006). Given such a workload, stress is inevitable (Hayhoe, 2004).

Work Stress. The daily struggle of teachers because of their workloads and especially teaching other fields outside their specialty is very hard and unmanageable. After few months, many of the participants reported that it took a toll on them and decrease their motivation and satisfaction towards their job. All of them felt tired and stress that they don't have anymore time to relax and fulfill other aspects of their life. The following are their narratives:

I always feel tired and physically exhausted after a day's work. When I arrived at home, I usually want to rest immediately but I have to finish my bring home work (Participant 2)

I sometimes tell myself that I cannot do it anymore with a lot of work that I'm dealing with (Participant 4)

Stress is killing me but I cannot find time for relaxation. I sometimes think of getting absent but still my work will just be piled up (Participant 1)

Past studies by Betoret's (2006) and Huysman's (2008) research on burnout dimensions in teaching that prolong stress can lead to physical and psychological exhaustion. In fact, stress is one of the leading causes of teacher attrition (Betoret, 2006), and can lead to dissatisfaction (Kinsey, 2006). Furthermore, the research by Haberman (2005) revealed that productivity, performance, task, and attitude link to work stress. Such factors are associated with the fact that teaching is a multi-faceted profession.

Disconnect Exist Between Expectation and Actual scenario. Majority of the participants believe that their life as teacher would become easier in public school aside from higher salary rate as compared to private school. However, they realized that their salary cannot compensate with the workload and the number of clients to be served. All of them agreed that they even get money from their pocket to beautify their classroom and purchase materials needed in their lessons. They noted that even if they have lower salary in the private school, their materials and needed resources were adequately provided.

I used to buy materials to beautify my classroom which I don't do when I was in private school (Participant 6)

We are not provided with teaching materials like we used to have in private school (Participant 2)

I don't feel any support from our school when it comes to instructional materials. I buy my own class record, logistics, and printer (Participant 3)

This result has mirrored similar frustrations of new teachers experience for not receiving the adequate support mechanisms to teach successfully in the classroom (Betoret; Murshidi et al., 2006).

Moreover, they viewed that the number of class size for each classroom is unmanageable. With different personalities of students, many participants revealed that they spent sometimes on parenting their students due to some behavioral problems that can consume most of their time especially when doing counseling and consultation. Their expectation that just like from private school the minimum number of class size is seriously followed, however, they were shocked in public school that it is over the standard class size. Moreover, they feel isolated and just like an initiation of survival. Many of the old teachers will just say that sooner they can be able to adjust with the kind of environment and culture of support in the public school.

My expectation of having easier work vanished when I saw the number of students in the classroom (Participant 1)

I even put extra effort for consultation and counseling of students. I usually do it in my free time (Participant 6)

I feel alone and isolated. It frustrates me sometimes that nobody is helping me to adapt with the new environment (Participant 4)

Consistent with the literature, when a disconnect occurs, new teachers feel isolated, which leads to feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, anxiety, stress, isolation, and low self-efficacy (Inman & Marlow, 2004).

Shaping their image in the Public School

Table 2 presents the two themes that emerged regarding how the participants shape their image in the public school based on their experiences. The themes that were generated include the following: love of the profession and building a rewarding career.

Table 2
Shaping their image in Public School

Theme and Pattern	Description
Love for the Profession	Love working with students and making a difference in

	students' lives
Building a Rewarding Career	Fulfillment and joy because of the knowledge, experience and

Love for the Profession. Despite the difficulties experienced by first time public school teachers, majority of them expressed their love of working and inspiring their students. All of them have expressed their goal of making a difference in the lives of their students when they decided to enter the teaching profession. They realized that being in the public school equates with service even if they know how hard it is, hence, they recognized that teaching itself is a service profession and their clients are the students. They expressed their professionalism by acting as a role model for students, illustrating a passion for teaching through the coursework, making curricular lessons relevant and meaningful, building a classroom atmosphere of communication and trust, and fostering a student-teacher relationship are important skills for success within the teaching profession. The narratives include the following:

I know the difficulties but this is what teaching is all about (Participants 5)

The way I work hard in preparing my lessons, and working with different stakeholders is part of my job as a teacher (Participant 3)

The struggles I've experienced made me a better teacher. It teaches me how to be patient and resilient (Participant 1)

This theme can be explained by the theory of motivation, because when the teacher-student relationship is developed, communication is established, a relationship exists, trust is built, and a sense of accomplishment is experienced to teach successfully in the classroom (Robbins, 2005). Such motivators contribute to higher levels of self-efficacy. Higher levels of teacher self-efficacy may contribute to higher levels of performance efficacy, contentment in the teaching assignment, positive relationships with students.

Building a rewarding career. Although they have a lot of difficulties and adjustments, they realized that these experiences made them even strong, resilient, and developed their skills in teaching. They expressed fulfillment after surviving every challenges and have addressed all the issues related to their work. They consider their work as rewarding career that in the end they will have all the benefits from all of their experiences. Among the transcripts include:

I buy the idea that experiencing difficulties can upgrade your skills as a teacher (Participants 2)

I am happy that I survived all the challenges. I feel that I'm upgrading (Participant 4)

This result is supported by Johnson (2006) that teacher morale is a very important factor for success. When a teacher's morale is high, the career is more rewarding.

Insights and realizations learned from the experiences

Table 3 presents the two themes that emerged regarding the insights and realizations learned from the experiences of teacher. With all of the challenges and difficulties of teachers, some realizations were generated which enables them to survive in the new environment. The themes that were generated include the following: Learn to adapt, and being resilient.

Table 3
Insights and realizations learned from the experiences

Theme and Pattern	Description
Learn to adapt	Series of adjustments made by teachers in their new environment
Being resilient	Capacity to deal with pressure and demands in the workplace

Learn to adapt. Although at the very beginning, most of the teachers admitted that they resist in adjusting with the culture of public school because they came from private school orientation in which everything is provided in the classroom. However, they realized that they are now in different scenario and the only way to fulfill their goals is to accept the change. With such acceptance, they are already starting to adapt to the new climate and now difficult things became very already simple for them. The following are the narratives:

I have already learned to adapt to the public school culture (Participant 3)

Adjustments will just follow after all the struggles (Participant 2)

The only way to survive is to adapt and adjust to the new environment (Participant 1)

Being Resilient. Fostering resilience is the best way to deal with the work pressure in public school as reported by the participants. They manifest resiliency by strengthening their relationship with colleagues, maintaining a positive atmosphere, and taking all initiatives. Moreover, through collaboration and support from colleagues enables first-year teachers to endure a sense of acceptance as a member of the institution.

Old teachers help me understand the systems of the institution (Participant 1)

My colleagues provide an important role in my first year of teaching (Participant 3)

I always think positive (Participant 2, 3, 5)

I took some initiatives to manage my time and resources at school (All Participants)

By being resilient increases their self-esteem and increase their confidence at school. Self-esteem encompasses the need to know the importance of being a part in the school and classroom. Of all teachers, first-year teachers need the most support because support will build familiarity with how to instruct classroom students. Building positive relationships with colleagues will help create a coalition that will provide emotional support and influence first-year teacher retention, job satisfaction, and good teaching (Anhorn, 2008; Schlichte et al., 2005).

IMPLICATIONS

The first-year of teaching is a crucial stage among teachers in public school. With this, acclimatization is so important so that teachers can adapt gradually to the new culture, climate, and workload. Attrition can happen if teachers became burden which affects their efficiency, motivation, and self-esteem. It would affect the leadership if new teachers are poorly performing, and incidence of absences and dissatisfaction with job can happen if not acted very well by the Principal. Moreover, certain support mechanisms is very important especially in the basic needs of teachers in the classroom and minimizing loads and task can help teachers acclimatize to the new work environment. From the results of this research study, the Principals can discover strategies and tools to help those new teachers in the classroom, those who want to become teachers, and those who train and hire new teachers.

On the other hand, the teaching effectiveness will be

affected as a result of work stress and overload. The tradition of putting more loads to new teachers isn't directed towards better educational outcomes. It will be of disadvantage especially to the learners as the main beneficiary. However, through resilience and adjustments, the future teachers or those from private schools can learn from the results of this study that every challenge can be overwhelmed and the reality of situation in the public school can be their basis of their decision whether to transfer or not in government institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and implications of the study, the following recommended:

1. Since too much work overload is stressful to beginning teachers, it is advised that limiting the number of load for first-year teacher is of great help to facilitate their adjustments.
2. A comprehensive orientation should be conducted to enable the first-year teachers be familiarize on the systems and culture of the organization as well as acquaintance with their colleagues.
3. Recreational activities should be part of the program of the organization to reduce the stress of the Faculty and develop camaraderie with other employees.

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