TEACHING AMIDST UNCERTAINTIES: EMPLOYING INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN REACHING OUT THE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Reaching out the learners as an educator is more challenging in this new normal setting. This qualitative research employing phenomenology aimed to determine the live experiences of public elementary teachers relative to the employing innovative strategies in reaching out the learners in the Municipality of Pikit especially on the Special Geographical Areas under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Results showed that teachers were challenged by the Novel Approaches in Reaching out the learners, lack of learner's participation, poor internet connection, and communicating with parents and other stakeholders. Meanwhile, the teachers from the Department of Education utilized new approaches which can be of great help for achieving the greater heights and motivation that they can get from their loved ones can ignite their interest to continue with their studies.

KEYWORDS: Reaching Out the Learners, Innovative, Strategies, Challenges, Approaches & Teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Teachers are said to be flexible in dealing with different types of learners. They have strong coping mechanisms which make them focus in employing change into the lives of their learners and in the whole community. Their persistency and efficacy resulted to the delivery of quality education. Hence, in this time of the pandemic they have reached out their learners to assure them that they are partners to continue their education.

In basic education, the Department of Education offers different learning delivery modalities that the region, division, or school may adopt depending on the geographical location, socio-economic status, and quality of students. Those learning modalities aim to cater to the needs of learners from various walks of life. In this regard, teachers have had adjusted in the so called new normal setting of reaching out the learners (Jamon, Boholano, Cabanes-Jamon, & Pardillo, 2021).

Most public schools all over the country adopt the Modular Distance Learning Delivery as a mode of learning for its students. With this modality, students were given self-learning kits and self-learning modules for them to answer weekly with the help of their guardians and parents at home. Teachers also assure that there is open communication with the parents and students to continuously monitor and address their needs. However, it cannot be denied that teaching in the new normal has weaknesses and threats. To cite one concrete example, the health of frontline teachers is at risk for they have to physically distribute and retrieve modules from the parents or guardians. On the other hand, the new normal in education offers strengths and opportunities. For instance, teachers learn new skills with help of technology. They learn to use Google Classroom and Quipper as learning platforms. Meanwhile, more strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be cited based on the firsthand experiences of the teachers (Baticulon et al., 2021).

However, there were several cases of anxiety that this modality brought to the learners (Colegio, Abella, Mendoza, & Mojares, 2020). Conversely, there were numerous studies on the innovations applied by teachers in the new normal setting. These have been effective in assessing the performance as well as the learning abilities of the learners. The only problem is that these have focused on cases in the international area (Agarwal & Kaushik, 2020; Basialaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Locally, there are no studies that identified the innovative strategies employed by the teachers in this time of the pandemic. Hence, this created a gap which is the reason for the conduct of this study.

Equally important, this study is timely and relevant in order to see the panoramic perspective on the efforts being made by the teacher behind all the busy schedules and paper works that they are doing. As such, this provided an in-depth analysis on the types of pedagogies which are effective in these trying times. It is on this premise that this study was conducted.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study employing phenomenology was to determine the lived experiences of public elementary teachers relative to the innovative strategies that they are utilizing in reaching their learners. Also, it provided with their challenges as well as their coping strategies and an intervention program which improved their skills in handling the pupils in a health crisis like this.

1.3 Research Questions

What are the innovative strategies employed by teachers in reaching out their learners?

- What challenges did they experience in reaching out their learners?

- What strategies did they employ to cope with the challenges?

- What lessons can they share to other teachers who have struggles in reaching out their learners?

1.4 Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

This study was conducted in the Municipality of Pikit specifically on the Special Geographical Areas under the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This involved public elementary teachers from the selected barangays. It was conducted during the Second Semester of School Year 2020-2021.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, data collection, locale of the study, research participants, data analysis, role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

2.1. Research Design

This study will utilize qualitative phenomenological research design. The phenomenological design describes the interpretations of the participants from their experiences (Esterberg, 2002; Crang, 2003). The participants will respond to the questions. After, they were requested to participate in a Focus Group Discussion virtually and face to face, depending on the situation. At the end of this study, themes and common patterns were extracted from their responses. They decided to use a qualitative phenomenological research design because they would dwell on the individual experiences of the teachers under the new normal in Philippine public education.

2.2. Data Collection

The researcher first determined the informants and participants. After which, I wrote a letter address to the Ministry of Basic, Higher and Technical Education of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao relative to the purpose and aims of the study. Upon approval, another set of letters will be sent to the school heads where the informants were taken.

Prior to the date and time of the interview, I prepared the consent-to-participate form and the interview guide (Bhutta, 2004). These will be validated by the pool of experts in the field of qualitative research. Corrections were incorporated to improve the question which is necessary to cull out the needed information. The first to be interviewed were the Key Informants and followed by the Focus Group.

The audio-recorded responses were transcribed and translated into English. However, the translation was checked by a language expert. More so, the data analyst did the analysis of the themes embedded from the responses of the informants. As well, core ideas were drawn from each of the themes. Results were presented in tabular and textual forms.

2.3. Locale of the Study

I conducted this study among the schools within the Special Geographic Areas-Pikit Cluster of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. The Special Geographical Area included in this study are those institutions that comprises to embraced and accept the Bangsamoro Transitional government as the foremost leading rule to the core territory of the Bangsamoro. Insofar, the institutions that were involved to the Pikit cluster of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao under the surface of this study were cluster 1 particularly Batulawan Central Elementary School, Balongis Elementary School, Cluster 2, Fort Pikit Elementary School and cluster 3, Manaulanan Elementary School, Lagunde Elementary School, and Bulol Elementary School. These were the Special Geographic Area of Pikit Cluster that contains the range of the study.

Belowis the map of the locale of the study that best describes and specify the special geographic area (SGA) that constitutes the extent of the study.
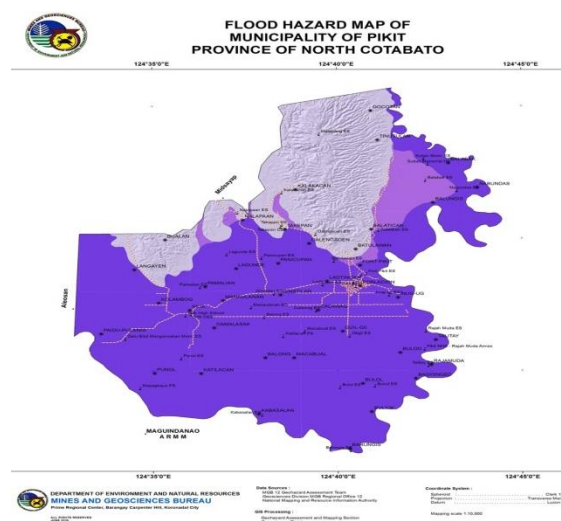

Figure 1

2.4 Research Participants

There were two groups who took part in this study. First, the informants for the Key Informant Interview (KII) (Mitchell, 1994), and the participants for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (Wong, 2008). Purposive sampling (Sharma, 2017) was used in the selection of the informants and participants, in particular the criterion-based sampling (Byrne, 2001). Below were the criteria for the selection:

- A public elementary teacher;

- At least 5 years and up in service;

- Assigned in the Special Geographic Areas of Pikit Cluster of BARMM.

2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to determine the themes (Sgier, 2012). This will be done through the utilization of the framework of the NVIVO (Welsh, 2002) as shown below:

General-50% of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

Typical-25-40% of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

Variant-20% of the informants shared the same theme of their responses

2.6 Role of the Researcher

It was my role to write permission to the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and on the school heads of the Special Geographical Areas under the Pikit Cluster. On the other hand, it was my task to personally interview the informants and participants by strictly following the IATF's health protocols. More so, I did the transcriptions of the audio-recorded responses.

2.7 Trustworthiness

I anchored the trustworthiness of this study with the views of Lincoln and Guba (1985) on credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Credibility is a criterion that corresponds, to some extent, to internal validity in traditional research. The criterion deals with whether credible and truthful findings and interpretations will be produced, where it applied to the collection of data as well as to the analysis. To assess credibility, as a researcher I was credible because I was assigned in one of the schools under the SGA of BARMM in Pikit Cluster. I also saw to it that I conducted the interview with the audit trail and the log frame. Also, I asked the help of the peer debriefer to review my paper.

To ensure confirmability, I saw to it that the findings of my study could either support or negate the results of previous researches. Confirmability in qualitative research corresponds to, but is not the same as, objectivity in quantitative designs. Both defend neutrality, i.e. research shall not distort the reality it set out to describe. This meant to us that our study should includeprocedures to verify that the findings and concepts described were founded in the data and not a result of poorly performed analytic work or preconceived assumptions. Confirmability means that the evaluation of the neutrality of a research project is moved from the researcher as a subject, and instead is focused on the data and the interpretation of the data.

To make transferability judgements possible, it is necessary to describe the context in which the study took place. It was also important to describe demographics such as ethnicity, family situation and socioeconomics in the population or group investigated. Then it was possible for others to decide whether the findings are relevant in other situations. Whether the conceived concepts and phenomena described lead to a recognition in new situations also depends upon how far the abstraction goes.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

In this study, I ensured that the identities of the informants and participants will be the utmost consideration. Hence, I assigned codes in order to hide their identities. Also, I prepared the consent form where they affixed their signature before their participation in the interview. The data collected were destroyed after it was interpreted and utilized for research purposes only.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the presentation of the findings of the study with the emergent themes from the responses of the informants.

3.1emergent Theme 1: Novel Approaches in Reaching out the Learners

The teachers found it essential that they need to resort to another strategy wherein they could not face any difficulties in reaching their learners. These are their partnership with the parents as well as the utilization of the social media.

In this time of the pandemic, the teachers from the Department of Education learners to utilize new approaches which can be of great help for achieving the greater heights. This health crisis was never been a problem for them to discover new strategies which they could reach the children in order for them to continue with their studies and have a brighter future.

Cluster Theme 1: Partnership with the Parents

Teachers believed that parents are their ultimate partners in reaching those learners who have struggles with their studies. As mentioned during the interview, they reiterated that:

> *"First, we try to contact the parents and informed them that during the new normal set – up there will be no face to face but we will try to reached out as much as we can through modular settings which means that there will be a schedule of retrieval and distribution of modules weekly and encouraged them to guide and take responsibility in teaching their kids at home and make some specific sound habits so that the children will also become updated."* (Informant 1)

> *"In the start of these modular classes, we briefly oriented the learners and parents to what we are going to used specially using the modality or modular way. One way or strategy is in the first day I gave incentives to those who will get modules regularly."* (Informant 13)

This implies that partnership with parents made a significant change on the lives of the learner. In the same manner, it is also the role of the parents to help the teachers. This conform that parental support helped in the improvement of learners. Also, it provides an idea that effective partnership makes a difference (Kong & Wang, 2021).

Cluster Theme 2: Utilization of the social media

The social media is highly utilized in this time of the pandemic. In this regard, teachers used this modality so that they could inform their learners as well as they could give their pieces of advice and encouragements to them. The informants verbalized that:

> *"The new strategy did I use to reach out my learners is I created a Group Chat (GC) for my section so that I could fast track the learning outcomes and the answering of modules of my learners."* (Informant 2)

> *"The strategy we are going to used is through online class because through this we can create a group chat which serves as our connection to reach our learners."* (Informant 15)

Since the social media is the easiest and the most promising mode of reaching out the learners, teachers have the other means which they could be ensured that their learners are doing their tasks at home. More so, the utilization of the social media is also one of the easiest ways considering that almost everyone has their own accounts. Social media is not just limited to posting pictures about holidays online. It has gained credibility over the years as a reliable source of information and platform where organizations can interact with audiences.Social network tools afford students and institutions with multiple opportunities to improve learning methods. Through these networks, you can incorporate social media plugins that enable sharing and interaction. Students can benefit from online tutorials through YouTube, online courses delivered by universities abroad through Skype and a wide array of resources that are shared through social networks (Gunawan, Suranti, &Fathoroni, 2020).

3.2. Emergent Theme 2: Hurdles in Reaching out the Learners

The pandemic has been so tough for the teachers. There are many challenges that they faced. One of which is the lacked of participation as well as the problem with regards to the internet connection. Indeed, this pandemic brought an enormous challenge to everyone. Even the teachers were never spared by it. Basically, it was arduous for them to find their learners considering that many parents are also afraid for health reasons. The unseen enemy is still lurking in the horizon. Hence, this predicament had brought difficulties for teachers especially on their participation and of course the internet connection.

Cluster Theme 1: Lack of Learners' Participation

The participation of the learners has been the priority of the teachers. However, because of the pandemic there are learners who have lost interest in their studies. Some of them failed to submit their tasks on time and some really expressed their intentions to stop. During the interview, the informant expressed

that:

> *"One of the problems is if the learners himself wouldn't want to participate specially that there are situations wherein the parents are getting the modules and they retrieved the modules and tried to checked them and the hand writing of the answers is that of the older one's because we know the hand writing of our pupils and we also know the hand writing of the older people. So, I just hope that the parents encouraged their children to answer to the best of their knowledge while they are guided by their parents not in the way that their parents will answer the modules."* (Informant 1)

Also:

"One of the problems that I have experiencing is that majority to the learners did not appear especially their parents in getting and returning the modules." (Informant 6)

Many teachers verbalized their sentiments that their learners lacked the participation. Some of them did not mind the contents of their self-learning modules. This can be attributed by the mere fact that the absence of face-to-face instruction brought them so much difficulties in understanding the concepts of the lessons. Thus, they were unmotivated to do their tasks in the midst of the pandemic. As mentioned by Hash (2021) here are many underlying reasons on the lack of participation among the students. One of which is the lack of support that they can get from their parents. Undeniably, their mentors have done their best to reaching them out. But the motivation that they can get from their loved ones can ignite their interest to continue with their studies.

Cluster Theme 2: Poor Internet Connection

Though, technology played an important role in this time of health crisis it also showed to have been one of the contributory factors on the challenges that are being faced by the teachers.

As shared during the interview that:

"A lot of problems I am being encountered one of these is communication. Another one is connections and attendance of the learners." (Informant 3)

In the same manner:

"One of the problems is poor connection especially here in my school because this place belongs to the far-flung areas." (Informant 5)

A manifestation that not everyone can enjoy the wonders of technology, many learners cannot easily be reached by their teachers because they are out of coverage area. They were trying to search them on the social media but to no avail. This problem can be associated by the poor internet connection especially to those learners who are living in the remote areas.

One of the biggest problems faced by students without internet access at home is their inability to complete homework. Those who say yes argue that homework allows students to continue learning at home and prepares them for the rigors of college. Others claim that homework is unfair—home is not an even playing field, and some students have access to more resources and a better environment for completing homework (Allo, 2020).

3.3. Emergent Theme 3: Conquering the Hurdles in Reaching out the Learners

It is the very nature of the teachers to stand amidst the adversities. They learned the essence of communication especially by partnering with parents and stakeholders. More importantly, they developed the value of patience.

Teachers need to overcome the challenges that they have experienced. Though, as human as they are they experienced all the difficulties in handling their learners because of the pandemic, yet they still find ways in order to allow the learners to continue with their studies.

Cluster Theme 1: Communicating with Parents and other Stakeholders

Dealing with parents would be a tough issue for the teachers. As there are those who refused to cooperate. Nevertheless,

they never surrendered and tried to win their trust and confidence.

One of the informants stated that:

"I try to convinced the parents because our area is far from the high risk covid cases areas so try to convinced them that if the child can and is able they should let the child get and retrieved the modules themselves so that I can check on the child and also the child would be familiar with me and also I am trying to be strict as possible with the attendance of retrieval and distribution of modules so that the child is aware on the grade which will be based on the attendance sheet which shows proofs that he/she is giving and returning and getting the modules himself." (Informant 1)

In addition,

"To overcome those challenges, I talk to the parents on Monday during retrieval and release of modules at school." (Informant 2)

"To overcome those challenges, we must conduct PTA meeting in order the parents know the importance of learning. Through this we can tackles all the problems and the parents should share their idea how to solve the problems." (Informant 15)

One of the best ways being done by the teachers is that they communicated with the parents. Though it is quite tiring for them but they did their best to really see the situation of their learners. Talking with their parents can make a difference because they were able to listen to the stories. More importantly, they could help them to help them as well to be their partners in honing their children. The role of the stakeholders especially those in the local government unit made a significant change in this matter. It conforms that their leadership enabled the members of the community to exert their efforts so that children will not be deprived of education.

Teachers strive to establish partnerships with parents to support student learning. Strong communication is fundamental to this partnership and to building a sense of community between home and school. In these changing times, teachers must continue to develop and expand their skills in order to maximize effective communication with parents (Laxton, Cooper, & Younie, 2021).

Cluster Theme 2: Developing Patience

Teachers need to have patience in order for them to handle every situation. They need to have it so that they could focus on things that could help the learners to continue with their studies.

This was supported by the responses of the informants that:

"For me to overcome those challenges being a teacher we must develop our patience and don't lose hope to encourage them to do their part as a learner." (Informant 4)

"I face with patience and perseverance, I talked to my students on the matters regarding the distribution of modules and of how it had been returned and let them understand that the attendance sheet is the basis of giving grades." (Informant 11)

Teachers need to develop patience in handling the parents, children, stakeholders, as well as in the distribution and retrieval of the self-learning modules. It made sense because they were able to continue their noblest profession amidst

the threat of the virus. In other words, the health crisis did not hinder them to produce learners who can be an epitome of excellence.

Obviously online learning doesn't translate in the same ways that in-person learning does. And though the younger generation is fairly adept at technology, for elementary-aged students who are still practicing and perfecting fine motor skills and penmanship, technology can't be the sole mode of learning. Hence, teachers must have to find ways and above all they need to be patient in handling every situation. This could actually make them stalwart in facing all the aridity in life (Sari & Nayir, 2020).

3.4 Emergent Theme 4: Life Lessons for Other Teachers

Teachers believed that in order for them to grow, they need to share their experiences to their colleagues in the profession. For them, they need to continue with their job to serve the children and to accept the reality that the pandemic is inevitable. As teachers, they have words of encouragements to other teachers who are facing the same dilemma. For them, teachers must not surrender and that they need to continue to serve the children and by accepting the reality that the pandemic is part of their existence.

Cluster Theme 1: Continuity of the Service to the Children

It is an oath of teachers to serve the community. Above all, they need to teach the children regardless of their socio-economic status in life. Furthermore, this gives the realization that they are born to serve and not to be served. It was mentioned during the interview that:

> *"I will advise them to continue doing the best for our learners until we will reach our targets for their learning."* (Informant 4)

> *I will adviseteachers to do what they want. Let us do our responsibilities to sustain the needs of our learners.*(Informant 5)

> *I will advise to continue and don't stop guiding and supporting our learners because this is our responsibility being a teacher and act as a role model.* (Informant 6)

Teachers as role models of patience and strength continued to fight so that their profession will be protected. They see to it that they could still give the best of their abilities and fulfill their duties and responsibilities in the different modalities. Indeed, for them nothing has changed it is only the mode of instruction where the learners have to stay at home and answer their self-learning modules.

In the same manner, Sahoo (2020) confirmed that the love of children and profession made teachers to find ways in the midst of different calamities.

They even tried to face the enemies without hesitations. What is important for them is that they could be able to translate the bodies of knowledge into the level of the learners and that they could grow and foster to be learned individuals.

Cluster Theme 2: Acceptance of Facing the Reality

The pandemic is a reality that must be accepted in order to move on and face the new chapter of their lives. In the same manner, it also connotes that they should not incarcerate their lives on things that give them so much burden. As stated

during the interview, the informant revealed that:

> *"Actually, from time to time we are conducting meeting about these situations and we try to advice each other to be more patient and to find more solutions and to be more creative on the ways of handling this kind of situation because there are hardships along the way but of course we work hand in hand to survived."* (Informant 1)

In addition:

> *"My advice to my co – teachers to not give up even though we are experiencing this kind of situation. As a teacher I believed that this pandemic is not the hindrance to continue the learning and have a proper education to the learners."* (Informant 8)

In order to move forward and have to reach the apex of life, teachers believed that they need to accept the reality that indeed the pandemic is a threat but could never hamper the continuity of the delivery of the lessons. May it be a hurdle but they know rightly that they could make a difference on the lives of their learners. Through acceptance, they could not feel the exhaustion.

Accepting the reality could be a norm so that everyone could bring their lives in the new normal situation. Nobody escapes from the wrath of the virus; thus, they have to be strong enough and be true to their profession. Consequently, acceptance helps them improve their strategies in dealing with their learners (Ellis, Steadman, & Mao, 2020).

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The vulnerability of the children in this time of the pandemic made the teachers realized that indeed they are the backbone in the transformational development of their learners. Without them, the learners will be wandering the in the wilderness of darkness that even the rays of the sun cannot enter. On the other hand, teachers are becoming concerned with the needs of their learners. Hence, they have looked for strategies that could ensure the continuity of learning.

In the same manner, teachers have provided information to other teachers that they need to have to continue their services in these trying times. No one would have to surrender as life must go on. Through this, the learners may be able to realize together with their parents and the stakeholders to strengthen their partnerships so that everyone could not be left behind. The role of parents is beyond compare. Thus, it is a must for them to really look for the welfare of their children. They must see to it that they are pushing them in order that they could finish their studies.

Consequently, the utilization of the social media played a vital role in the delivery of instruction. With the absence of face-to-face, teachers have the other choice to show their care and love for their children. This is also amanifestation that they need to be equipped with knowledge and skills on the usage of these modalities so that they would not only limit their instructions in Self-learning modules. They could also explain to them directly on how the bodies of knowledge will be applied and could make an impact on their daily lives.

4.1 Implications for Future Research

This study applies the ideas that teachers as one of the vehicles of learning can find the best ways where their learners could grow and foster. For the future researchers, they could utilize the themes and the statement of the informants to come up with a questionnaire. By following the process, they could be able to test it to confirm and negate the findings of this

qualitative research.

More importantly, they could also include other municipalities in the Special Geographic Areas by having an equal distribution of the informants. Also, a case study will be employed so that every story of teachers will be highlighted. Nevertheless, teachers who participated in this study exemplified their efforts to respond to questions. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that they also have to include the school heads so that it could also be verbalized on what could schools do to the predicaments being faced by the teachers.

4.2 Concluding Remarks

Research is beyond my knowledge and my abilities. I knew well that I am not that sagacious in this matter. During my college years, we were assigned to come up with a thesis but then it was done by group. I was not able to appreciate its totality and future usage especially that teachers need to conduct action research and of course finish their master's and doctoral degrees.

As a teacher in the SGA-Pikit, I could always see that there are a lot of children who have no focus with their studies. Unlike before that they were still allowed to attend their classes, I can see on their faces the intensity to strengthen their knowledge and skills so that they could be able to discover different bodies of knowledge essential for their growth and developments.

I can also say that teachers are indeed heroes. They never been tired of

extending their help to their learners even though their lives are also at risk. I cannot fathom of how they solved the problems that they faced which they themselves have their own families to care. Above all, I am always carried by my profession that I would not allow this pandemic to stop me to hone the full potentialities of my learners.

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