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"Paghimud-os": Personal Experiences of Grade 1 Teachers in Blended Learning Modality

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Abstract:

The main purpose of this study is to unveil the experiences of Grade 1 teachers during the implementation of blended learning modality whenever there is an extreme heat index advisory that inhibits the learners to be physically in school because of its threat to their health and to the teachers alike. To present this research, phenomenological design and purposeful sampling was employed. This study was conducted in Cluster 2, District of EB Magalona, Negros Occidental Division. Ten (10) Grade 1 teachers who have been teaching from 5 years and up were interviewed. To gather the qualitative data, this study used the semi-structured method of an in-depth interview using an interview guide. Results showed that participants have positive experiences which are categorized into innovation, creativity and adaptability. They also have negative experiences in terms of student engagement, attendance and physical and emotional aspects. The participants employed traditional methods in providing learning materials and modern methods that include communication, technology and flexibility. The participants' remarkable experiences were categorized as self-motivation for adaptation, resourcefulness and resilience and driven by environmental factors such as parental and community involvement.

Keywords: heat index, blended learning, adaptability

Introduction:

Blended learning has become increasingly important in education even before the pandemic. Technological integration in teaching has offered a lot of benefits to teachers and learners alike. According to Alvarez (2020), blended-based instruction has the potential to bring teaching and learning flexibility and promotes learning independence and opportunities for networked learning and accessibility to both teachers and students. (Bonifacio, 2013) as cited by Villanueva , et.al. (2023)claims that the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in K-12 schools was anticipated to enable computerization programs, flexible learning options, and the use of educational technologies and online learning resources.

The Philippines is known to be a tropical country but during the early months of 2024, the heat index has increased to a dangerous level. Thousands of schools have suspended classes due to the disturbing heat. These concerns about extreme heat conditions have been the basis for the implementation of blended learning in all public and even private schools in the country. This is to ensure learning continuity despite the situation. According to Alvarez (2020), blended-based instruction has the potential to bring teaching and learning flexibility and promotes learning independence and opportunities for networked learning and accessibility to both teachers and students. (Bonifacio, 2013) as cited by Villanueva, et.al. (2023) claims that the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in K-12 schools was anticipated to enable computerization programs, flexible learning options, and the use of educational technologies and online learning resources.

Objectives of the Study

This study will highlight the experiences and stories of Grade 1 teachers in teaching the fundamental skills of reading, writing and arithmetic while implementing blended learning in extreme heat conditions. Moreover, it aims to explore the personal accounts, coping mechanism and remarkable experiences of grade 1 teachers in implementing blended learning modality. Specifically, this study will answer the following questions:

1.What are the personal accounts of Grade 1 teachers in the implementation of blended learning modality in high heat index phenomenon?

2.How do Grade 1 teachers cope with the challenges brought about by the implementation of blended learning modality in response to high heat index?

3. What are the remarkable experiences that the grade 1 teachers encountered during the implementation of blended learning in high heat index phenomenon that would help them overcome other challenges in the future?

Literature Review

Blended learning started a long time ago. According to (Tupas,et.al,2020), the results of their study showed blended learning started three decades ago, specifically for higher education institutions (HEIs), also used in graduate programs and professional development. The need and importance of blended learning has been highlighted during the onset of pandemic in 2019. DepEd proposed to use online learning, modular approach, radio-television methods, face-to-face, and para-teachers for blended learning. Components of a traditional classroom were migrated online. Curriculum guides, homeworks and announcements are accessed virtually through a learning management system or school website. This was only possible for prestigious private schools who can afford the system. Nevertheless, most public schools, especially the elementary level, resorted to modular instruction due to lack of internet connectivity in most of the learners' households.

Villanueva, et.al (2022) stated in their study analysis about blended learning which affirmed that 'regulating learning' as the intersection of cognitive presence and teaching presence is possible. This means that blended learning can be effective when the teacher facilitates and the parents or guardians provide support by helping the learners complete their learning tasks at home. The practical skills manifested by students in blended learning were interpreting, communicating, designing, recording, analyzing, and questioning. Results showed no significant difference existed between academic achievement of students exposed to blended learning approach and to those exposed to nonblended learning approach, both improved their performances (Hinampas, et.al., 2018).

Meanwhile, there was a significant difference in the practical skills manifested between those students exposed to a blended learning approach and those nonexposed to a blended learning approach. Most of the learning skills can be mastered whether we implement blended learning or face to face. The outcome is still dependent on the level of support and guidance provided by the parents and guardians at home. Practical skills in science, as this discipline requires hands-on experiences like experimentation, which is quite similar to practicing reading, writing and arithmetic which are the core skills expected to be mastered by a grade 1 learner before the school year ends, is not fully developed in blended learning. This is where the teacher strategizes and innovates to make sure that no skill is neglected during the implementation of blended learning amidst changing phenomenons.

On Extreme Heat Conditions Filipino children are accustomed to hot weather being born in a tropical country, Philippines. Technically, our country rains from June to November and is dry from December to May. March to May have been considered as the hottest months and are usually referred to as "summer season". During the pandemic,due to some delays in the preparation for learning continuity measures, there have been some alterations and modifications made in the usual school year calendar. Opening of classes were scheduled in October and ended in July during the academic year 2020, September to June in 2021, August to June in 2022 and August to June in 2023. The school year 2023-2024 which started from August 29, 2023 has been scheduled to end in June 2024. But when January 2024 came, the country started to experience a gradual increase in temperature higher than how it used to be. The El Nino phenomenon exacerbated the heat index felt across the country. Schools, as mandated by the national level, implemented different schemes and shifted to blended learning for the welfare of teachers and learners and this went on until the academic year was decided to end by May. Climate change has impacted the daily lives of learners, aggravating the risks of those who belong to poor households.

(Berse,2017)stated in their study "Climate change from the lens of Malolos children: perception, impact and adaptation" that interventions to mitigate the impacts of climate change on children at the household, community, and city levels were found to be lacking. Climate change does not only affect the education of Filipinos but their total being. We have been confronted by perennial problems in our education sectors like lack of classroom and facilities, learning materials, substandard infrastructures and many more. This high heat index condition just added salt on our wounds.

Research Methodology:

This study utilized Qualitative Approach, which uses several techniques including interviews, focused groups and observation (Tenny, et.al. 2022) The data were evaluated inductively, from specifics to themes (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). To present this research, phenomenological design was employed. Phenomenology is a type of research that seeks to explain the nature of things through the way people experience them (Dovetail, 2023). This involves interviewing Grade 1 teachers on their personal accounts, coping mechanisms and remarkable experiences.

The study was conducted in Cluster 2, District of EB Magalona, Negros Occidental Division. These are the 10 Grade 1 teachers who have been teaching from 5 years and up. In this research investigation, Creswell (1998, as cited by Mason, 2010) provided a guideline on the range of informants which is 5 to 25 for phenomenology. For this study, 10 participants were interviewed. Inclusion criteria included those grade 1 teachers who have been teaching for 5 years and up. Male or female participants teaching grade 1 who have been serving the Department of Education were taken for the interview.

Purposeful sampling is utilized in this study. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, 2015). To gather the qualitative data, this study used the semi-structured method of an in-depth interview, using an interview guide. Semi-structured interview is usually employed in qualitative research, and it involves a number of open-ended questions based on the topic areas that the study wants to cover.

The researcher instrument was validated by nine (9) expert validators in the field of study, using the widely used appraisal of content validity C. H. Lawshe (1975). The reliability of the research instrument was determined using the Heuristic Evaluation Method. Nine (9) evaluators examined the items in the questionnaire independently and checked the relevance level of the instrument.

The researcher first secured the approval of the Public Schools District Supervisor. Once approved, a letter request regarding the conduct of the study was sent to the school principals of the schools involved in the data gathering. Likewise, an informed consent containing the purpose and the conditions of the agreement was given to the identified participants.

The data had undergone phenomenological analysis, following the six steps in data analysis and interpretation by John W. Creswell (2014).

1. **Organize and transcribe**. In this step, the researcher repeatedly listened to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the participants. The researcher then entered the world of the participants and absorbed the uniqueness of their experiences.
2. **Read or look at all the data**. This step provided a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. The researcher took down notes in margins of transcripts and start recording general thoughts about the data.
3. **Start coding all of the data**. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Rossman & Rallis, 2012 cite in Creswell, 2014). It involves taking text data gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an in vivo terms). In this study, the researcher re-read the data to see if there were themes that needed to be merged to form a singular unifying theme. The researcher will combine similar cluster of themes that formed a major idea, and labeled it word or phrase to represent the combined ideas to form a second order theme.
4. **Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis**. Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Researcher can generate codes for this description. Use the coding as well as for generating a small number of themes or categories – perhaps five to seven themes for a research study (Creswell, 2014). This second part of the coding is a process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data.
5. **Advance how the description and themes was represented in the qualitative narrative**. The researcher used a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. This included the discussion that mentions a chronology of events, the detailed discussion of several themes or a discussion with interconnecting themes (Creswell, 2014).
6. **A final step in data analysis involves making an interpretation in qualitative research of the findings or results**. Asking, "What were the lessons learned?" captures the essence of this idea (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Creswell, 2014). These lessons could be the researcher's personal interpretation, couched in the understanding that the inquirer brings to the study from a personal culture, history, and experiences.

Results and Discussion

The results of this qualitative investigation disclosed a nuanced view of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing blended learning during extreme heat conditions. From the findings, meaningful units were

clustered into six (6) themes. These include (1) Positive and (2) Negative Experiences ; (3) Traditional;(4) Modern Methods; (5) Self-Motivation and (6) Environmental Factors. Sub-themes for Positive Experiences are Innovation and Creativity and Adaptability and for Negative Experiences Student Engagement and Attendance and Physical and Emotional Toll. Sub-theme for Traditional Methods is Provision of Materials and for Modern Methods includes Communication and Technology. Subthemes for Self Motivation includes Adaptation and Resourcefulness and Resilience while Environmental Factors includes Parent and Community Involvement.

Participants generally acknowledged the severe difficulties posed by extreme heat in the context of blended learning but also recognize the potential for growth and adaptation. Innovation, flexibility, and creative problem-solving emerge as necessary traits for managing these conditions. The responses collectively underscore the need for practical solutions to logistical problems and highlight the adverse effects on student engagement and overall learning experiences. Additionally, the feedback points to a significant strain on both students and teachers, requiring robust support systems to ensure effective education delivery under such challenging circumstances.

The participants' responses demonstrate a multifaceted approach to overcoming the challenges posed by extreme heat in the context of blended learning. These strategies include:

- Provision of Materials: Ensuring students have access to necessary learning materials, such as activity sheets, modules, and reading materials, to continue their education at home.
- Communication and Support: Maintaining robust communication with students and parents to provide guidance, updates, and support, ensuring everyone is aligned and engaged.
- Flexibility and Adaptation: Adjusting schedules, formats, and delivery methods to accommodate the challenging conditions, highlighting the need for agility in teaching approaches.
- Leveraging Technology: Utilizing digital tools and platforms to deliver lessons, share materials, and collect student outputs, ensuring that learning can proceed uninterrupted.

These strategies collectively reflect a commitment to maintaining educational continuity and quality despite the adverse conditions, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of teachers.

Conclusions:

Blended learning modality has been one primary option in delivering instruction even before pandemic. AIS, post graduate departments and HEIs have been using modular instruction since then because of the varied available time of students. This study explores the experiences and challenges of Grade 1 teachers in implementing blended learning modality in extreme heat conditions. This qualitative study therefore presents the unique strategies, interventions and innovations employed by Grade 1 teachers to effectively implement blended learning. Through the data obtained in the study, this concludes that the implementation of blended learning in extreme heat conditions derives a lot of challenges and experiences especially to grade 1 teachers who impart the fundamental skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to the learners. These varied experiences translate to the strategies , intervention and innovation that teachers utilized to ensure learning continuity despite the sudden shift to modular instruction to combat the adverse effects of extreme heat to the health of teachers and learners. These methods are categorized into traditional and modern. Traditional methods include the provision of materials while modern methods incorporate the use of technology for ease of communication.

The responses indicate that teachers have gained valuable insights from implementing blended learning under extreme heat conditions, which can help them tackle future challenges. These insights include:
Flexibility and Adaptability: Teachers need to be prepared for unpredictable changes and be able to adjust their plans quickly to ensure continuous and effective learning.

Parent and Community Involvement: Strong relationships with parents and the community are crucial for creating a supportive learning environment, especially when parents play a significant role in their children's education at home.

Resourcefulness and Resilience: Teachers must be resourceful in finding ways to engage students and address learning gaps, demonstrating resilience in overcoming obstacles.
Adaptation to Digital Tools and Changing Conditions: Embracing digital tools and staying updated with technological advancements are essential for modern education, enabling teachers to deliver lessons effectively even in challenging conditions.

These learnings highlight the importance of adaptability, community collaboration, and technological proficiency in ensuring educational continuity and effectiveness, preparing teachers to better handle future challenges.

Recommendations:

In the light of the findings and conclusions reflected in this study, the following recommendations are thereby given:

1. The Department of Education, together with the Local and Barangay Officials may provide supplemental digital learning materials appropriate for every grade level especially for grade 1 learners who are beginning to learn the basics.
2. The Department of Education, together with the Local and Barangay Officials may capacitate home partners (parents, relatives, older siblings or guardians) of the learners on how they can effectively help them learn at home with modular and digital instructions. Schools may also spearhead for the orientation at the beginning of the school year pertaining to the implementation of blended learning as our time has become more unpredictable than before.
3. The Department of Education along with other government institutions may work closely together in providing basic digital gadgets with internet connectivity for learners as not every household can afford one. This is also to ensure that every household is reachable for disaster management and overall academic purposes.
4. DSWD may convert part of 4ps cash assistance into school supplies or learning materials that can aid learning.
5. Results of this paper may be shared to the districts and to the schools to empower primary grade teachers especially grade 1 teachers to innovate, strategize and work positively towards effective uninterrupted instruction.
6. Future research may be conducted by other researchers to explore experiences of other grade levels in the elementary in the implementation of blended learning modality in extreme heat conditions, outbreak of diseases or during disasters and calamities. Likewise, a similar study may be conducted to support or negate the findings of the present investigation.

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