

A TEACHERS' JOURNEY: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN TEACHING RESEARCH

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Abstract

This study portrays the lived experiences of some research teachers from different public and private schools in Cebu City who taught specific research subjects in the senior high schools for the first semester of 2018-2019. The main goal of this study is to explore the educational practices of the nine teacher respondents based on their trials, adjustments, managing mechanisms, who showed willingness to participate. The descriptive phenomenological design was used by the researcher from Husserlian philosophy using Colaizzi Data Analysis. Semi-structured interviews were collated and coded after bracketing. Furthermore, the field notes were used for the informants upon asking their consent as a form ethical consideration. The highlights of the experiences of these research teachers are condensed in the following themes: *"Different Strokes for Different Strokes"*; *"Invest and Harvest"*; *"Art of Communication"*; *"Between Hard and Soft"*; *Time will Reveal"*; and *"Technology Conquers Limitations."* Results also showed that the research teachers still consider the whole experience worthwhile and beneficial despite "scanty of instructional materials and relevant trainings" which has long been a predicament in enriching the curriculum.

Keywords: *Research teacher, senior high school, phenomenology, challenges, creativity,*

INTRODUCTION

Evidenced-based practice involves systematic, deliberate, and self-critical-inquiry about a research teacher as a practitioner modelled by professional action in education which is desirable especially on teaching research (Borg, 2006). There are several advantages for teachers engaging these activities as exemplified by Kincheloe (2003) such as the benefits of teaching research, in-depth and enrichment ways from their experiences, functional learners on the art of questioning, crafters of knowledge on enhancing their professional needs and current trends of education as well as a continuous exploration of the phenomena in the classroom setting that are subject for interpretation.

Additionally, the improvement of teaching profession inspired the teachers in response to the changing conditions when they are more engaged with their senior high school students with this developing K-12 curriculum of the Department of Education. Their students' learning was also investigated to validate the progress. Thus, different strategies and professional attributes influenced the research teachers through attending relevant trainings and seminar-workshops, conducting action research pertaining to issues and be shared its findings during in-service trainings (Hei & David, 2017).

The concept of research is relative to the work of practitioners, administrators, and lawmakers. Much more in the field of the academe wherein professional education has a strong and continuous advocacy of learning, analysis of findings, behavioral adaptation, and conforming institutional standards for quality education (Pamatmat, 2016). Therefore, undergoing research is a responsibility to be functioned by scholarly investigators

in various disciplines without taking for granted their queries to be answered with authentic dissemination of the report.

This paper aimed to gain deeper understanding on the lived experiences – the aspirations, challenges, adjustments, and their coping mechanisms of the research teachers at senior high school students in private and public schools in Cebu City during the first semester of school year 2018-2019. Moreover, these research teacher participants ‘fortunately’ or ‘unfortunately’ were thirsty in strengthening the links between research and teaching. It also sought to assess whether the curriculum provided by the academe is relevant and useful to the actual carry out teaching considering that not much has been published about high school teachers’ aspirations and beliefs about research, and their actual experience with it. These are viewed very helpful as basis for curriculum revisiting and enrichment to really promote the research culture in the Department of Education-secondary level as well as in similar contexts.

Theoretical Underpinnings

From the curriculum guide of senior high school Practical Research 1, the nature of inquiry and research are the two terms to be tackled in the content standard. Both involve investigative work in which the researcher seeks information about something by searching or examining the object of research (Baraceros, 2016).

Inquiry-based learning gets its support from John Dewey’s theory “Learning by Doing” as cited by Gandhi (in Malagar, Villarba, & Bonotan, 2016). The following assumptions of learning by doing are specified as experiential learning to wit:

1. Individuals learn best when they are engaged in different learning experiences.
2. Information has to be revealed through significant meanings and behavior; and
3. The independence of learning is a commitment for every engaged individual to attain the highest learning given the objectives and the framework.

Moreover, when something has been experienced, there are sufferings to be undergone, therefore. The act of doing something on these things will bring back something good in return, and maybe in an unusual setting for an inquirer. These connecting phases measure the success of activities experienced by the teacher-researcher with their students (Dewey, 1997).

The Theory of Skills Acquisition by Dreyfus postulated that behaviour and rationality of three to five years of experience were considered novice. But with more than five years of experience, there is a potential development of skills reaching up to the level of being an expert (Wallace & Irons, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Following the research ethics protocol, a brief background of the study to the prospective participants was given to them underscoring its merits and benefits. The researcher then asked for the participants’ informed consent. Once the participants expressed their willingness to be interviewed, only then did the interview begin. Permission was asked for the audio taping of the conversation for greater accuracy of the data collection. The confidentiality and anonymity would be strictly observed from the participants as an assurance. The interview questions were open-ended questions which include the opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of the research teachers in the senior high school students, and the preparation and coping mechanism of the participants to adapt to their unique situation. The participants were also asked to fill up a written form about their demographical data and checklist regarding their attitudes toward research. The demographical data and checklist on participants were stores separately from the code books culled from the recordings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study make used of descriptive phenomenological study based on Husserlian philosophical approach and Colaizzi’s method for qualitative data analysis. The philosophical stance of Husserlian phenomenology is that

of the lived, human experience and as such it required to restore the human world as a basis of science that brought justice to the everyday lived experience (Christensen, Welch, & Barr, 2017). Moreover, the rich and multifaceted source of undeclared meaning connected with being and experiencing shapes an individual understands of their lifeworld. On the other hand, descriptive phenomenology, is regarded as a valuable for qualitative design or methodical tool for focusing on research questions to probe and enlighten about a phenomenon by providing images to capture meanings of the situations (Malagar, Villarba, & Bonotan, 2016).

The main instrument of this study was the researcher himself who conducted in-depth interview with the participants to generate data about the participants' personal and professional experiences. Since the goal of phenomenological interviewing is to describe the meaning of some events, from the lens of the participants and not of the researcher, a central concern is for the researcher to hold in abeyance, one's own presuppositions regarding the experience to be described – a process termed bracketing (Pollo, Henly & Thompson, Kornhaber in Malagar et al. 2016). It refers to the suspension of one's beliefs, assumptions, preconceptions, and biases related to the phenomenon under investigation so that the phenomenon can be seen with a fresh approach. This is a fundamental concept aligned to Husserlian philosophy which ensures a trustworthy description of the phenomenon.

Participants of the Study

There are Nine (9) faculty or basic educators from different secondary public and private institutions in Cebu City were purposely chosen as participants/informants of this research study. The informants comprising of 6 females and 3 males; among them, 5 are married, 4 are single and the age group ranges from 25-45 years old. As regards to educational attainment, two (2) have completed their post graduate studies, four (4) have completed the master's degree, and three (3) hold bachelor's degree with master's units. Three (3) of them are teaching research in the science class in the public junior high school, two (2) are teaching in the public high school, one (1) in the state university (1) in science high school, Cebu; and two (2) from private institutions. As to research subjects taught, three (3) are teaching Research 1 and 2 in Grades 8 and 9; one (1) is teaching Creative Investigations (CI) and Practical Research 2; and the remaining five (5) are assigned to teach either Practical Research subjects, or Mixed research. In terms of employment status, majority are holding a regular permanent status, while only one (1) is a newly hired. When it comes to research outputs produced, all regular permanent teachers have completed their theses except for the only one (1) respondent who was able to publish an international journal and presented a research congress. They have been teaching for several years which made them part of the research sample.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The highlights of the lived experiences of the research teachers are condensed in the following themes:

1. "Different Strokes for Different Folks"
2. "Invest and Harvest"
3. "Art of Communication"
4. "Between Hard and Soft"
5. "Time will Reveal"
6. "Technology Conquers Limitations"

Theme 1: "Different Strokes for Different Folks"

The participants coming from different schools and grade levels are prepared to teach according to there are of specialization. However, their teaching styles vary as they describe their student's learning style and the compelling reasons to have more training in research methods. They truly admitted that their experiences in teaching prior to the opening of the senior high school research subjects are not enough considering the

complexity and scope of research methods. With more than five years' experience, one may potentially develop skills to the level described as expert. As a participant shared:

"Teaching research, it was quite tedious at first but overtime I learned to employ some strategies which made it easier for me to teach the subject. Most of the time, I used the lecture method then I had the one-one-one mentoring which proved to be very helpful and effective." (INF#4, Line 14-18)

Participants 6 and 2 added that

"My experiences in teaching research have been a roller coaster ride. At times I feel so hyped and energetic especially if I am well-conditioned like I've had enough sleep the prior night and the topic that we'll be dealing is too easy. There are also moments wherein I regret teaching the subject and I feel I am not crafted for it." (INF#2, Line 10-15)

Theme 2: "Invest and Harvest"

Some of the participants remarked that teaching research is a form of investment. For what they have sown could be reaped a hundred folds out of their prowess. They were able to cope with all those challenges they have faced through their courage, support system and camaraderie. As mentioned by a participant:

"As a newbie in the field of teaching research, I have experienced things I considered useful and essential not just only for the students, but also a platform for me to expound my learning and explore more. I also have learned that is not easy as frying eggs, but as fulfilled as a noble teacher when you have witnessed that students learned and found the essence of research significant to their lives and to the society...that I have helped my students to wonder what's beyond the theories and guided them to experience and experiment." (INF#3, Line 11-20)

Theme 3: "Art of Communication"

Since learning is a continuous process, the modes of communication in research can be intensively done especially in providing the research teachers with many ideas about how they can design and carry out their art of teaching effectively. Thus, some participants value the importance of communication as they said in part:

"I also account my experiences and learned managed my time especially in reading useful manuscripts, journals, and other print media essential to address my students' queries." (INF#3, Line 53-56)

"The struggles that I usually encountered were the lack of resource book, facilities like library, equipment's, computers that used to upgrade, also the lack of support." (INF#5, Line 9-11)

Theme 4: "Between Hard and Soft"

Research studies happen in any field of knowledge. On the other hand, some research teachers claimed that their teaching experience influence their performance according to their adjustments as they have used to teach based on their majors. This was affirmed by participants who were once teaching hard sciences (natural science) and soft sciences (humanities and social sciences) in the junior high school level saying:

"Particularly, those struggles most of the time are the topics that are not really related in my field though it is really related in science...they have many topics, struggles, and research design I am not comfortable which I am not familiar with, but because I used to do experimental activities, though I know some research designs like descriptive chosen by students...Not really a mismatch because it still science. Though specific to teaching physics, there are some points that they could relate. But not that really sharp." (INF#7, Line 27-32, 51-53)

Theme 5: "Time will Reveal"

Research is time consuming. In other words, research teachers who are conducting research study and even budget the content standard from the curriculum guide or syllabi should be conscious enough on the characteristic of prudence. Thus, the participants commented:

"It took them much time to ponder on research problem to the point that I ended up spoon-feeding it to them...Next is their poor time management. As observed, most of them procrastinate, thus submitting their group outputs on time became an issue." (INF#4, Line 33-34, 39-41)

"In teaching research as we all know, research is time consuming, takes dedication, patience, finding the cause and effects, and whys and how's. In doing so, we must have a time, but one of the challenges especially for single moms they have other things to do aside from..." (INF#9, Line 7-11)

Theme 6: "Technology Conquers Limitations"

With the surge in the use of information and communication technology, there is a need to have standardized and more reliable research. However, assessing the improvement in research as well as academic writing skills is subject for upgrading due to scantiness of technological equipment. Informants 5 suggested:

"It would be better if there was an internet connection so that there will be an easy access to information when they are searching." (INF#5, Line 22-23)

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study distilled the essence of what is like to be a research teacher in the secondary level. It is like "different strokes for different folks" comprising groups of teachers who teach in various ways. One must invest to harvest; and in return it would turn into an effective tool in teaching effectively and produce graduates that are valuable in society. They realized that the art of communication in teaching research plays a significant role especially in the field of reading and asking guide from their colleagues through exchanging of ideas during scanty teaching resources. The informants confronted to accept these challenges even if their experiences were not enough due to lack of training resulting to admit the fact that their specific major is aligned to hard or soft sciences. Their efficiency in teaching research needs ample time; more so in producing related research outputs that are in high demand and for personal and professional growth. Based on their experiences, they still aspired to accept the challenge with the hope of providing them with available and adequate technology which conquers limitation in teaching diverse learners.

Recommendation

The following recommendations have been developed from the data collected as part of this research. Recommendations are being made in three categories:

Senior High School Teachers who need more knowledge in teaching research should consider: 1) a meticulous reading of research materials such as journals, research books, and monographs having different research designs; 2) pursue research culture by finishing their post-graduate studies and participate in research congress; and 3) teachers should be reduced with teaching loads in order to have time doing an action research mandated by the Department of Education.

School heads may consider: 1) initiating in putting a functional research and development office to enhance their teachers' basic pedagogical knowledge from the standpoint of Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST); and 2) inviting expert to conduct seminar-workshops to educate their teachers regarding educational research since they are considered as instructional leaders during their respective Learning Action Cell (LAC) session.

A parallel study is recommended to expand the scope of this study. Considering its limited scope and methodology, the researcher recommends the following research topics to serve as an additional development and verify during in-service trainings or learning action cell session. The inclusion of others in this study is strongly adhered and is addressed to the master teachers, head teachers, and school heads as instructional leaders.

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