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Implementation of Alternative Delivery Mode to Pupils at Risk of Dropping Out: Elementary Teachers' Predicaments in Focus

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Abstract

The teacher plays an imperative role in guiding learners towards the achievement of learning goals. To maximize learners' capacity and address the growing concern of school dropouts, especially exacerbated by the challenges posed by the aftermath of the pandemic, it is substantial to employ effective scaffolding strategies. This study focused on exploring the lived experiences of Elementary teachers involved in the implementation of an Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) aimed at supporting pupils at risk of dropping out (PARDOs). Specifically, the study aimed to describe the challenges faced by teachers in executing this intervention. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, six elementary teachers were purposefully selected and interviewed to gather rich and detailed information about their experiences. Thematic analysis of the data revealed four prominent themes: (1) grappling with limited learning resources, (2) juggling overlapping roles and responsibilities, (3) navigating travel risks, and (4) expressing concerns about learning outcomes. The study's findings underscore significant implications for government and educational leaders, urging them to consider evidence-based decision-making and take appropriate actions to address the identified challenges.

Keywords: *alternative delivery mode, elementary teachers challenges, pupils at risk of dropping out, phenomenology*

Introduction

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education has prompted significant concerns, particularly regarding access to quality education. As schools reopened for face-to-face classes, emerging data from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reveals a disturbing trend: a considerable number of children worldwide are dropping out. In the Philippines, the situation is alarming, with the percentage of out-of-school youth escalating from 16.9 percent in January 2020 to 25.2 percent in April 2020, as reported by the US Agency for International Development in November 2021.

The issue of school dropouts is not confined to a specific region; it is a global challenge. Numerous studies have attempted to develop interventions to reduce dropout rates and proactively manage those at risk (Rai, 2013). Countries around the world have conducted various studies to understand the reasons behind the increasing dropout rates. In Zimbabwe, research by Chinyoka (2014) identifies poverty, child labor, dysfunctional families, malnutrition, and other health-related issues as factors contributing to the continued dropout rate. In the United States, Burrus and Roberts (2012) point to demographic reasons, low academic performance, and self-identified factors such as uninteresting classes, challenging tests, and poor attendance as causes for students dropping out.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) coined the term Pupils-At-Risk of Dropping Out (PARDOs) to refer to elementary learners likely to become candidates for dropout. The department has identified various reasons for this phenomenon, including socio-economic status, child labor, early pregnancy, and health-related problems. To address the needs of these at-risk learners, DepEd established Alternative Delivery Modes (ADM) through Department Order No. 24, s.2012, known as the Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of Alternative Delivery Modes. This initiative aims to offer flexible and accessible learning, allowing students to acquire skills and competencies in basic education at their own pace. However, despite these efforts, the implementation of ADM faces numerous challenges.

While several studies have focused on the experiences of students and parents in remote learning, there remains a significant gap in research concerning the lived experiences of elementary teachers implementing alternative delivery modes for pupils-at-risk of dropping out. This gap in understanding the teacher's perspective becomes a focal point for the researcher. Utilizing phenomenology as the research design, this study delves into the lived experiences of elementary teachers providing interventions for pupils-at-risk of dropping out through alternative delivery modes. The implications of this research endeavor extend to informing appropriate actions by governments and learning institutions to support teachers in overcoming the challenges they encounter in implementing ADM.

Research Questions

In view of the gaps established at the beginning of this paper, the study sheds light on the following:

1. What are the challenges experienced by elementary teachers in the implementation of Alternative Delivery Mode (ADM) to pupils-at-risk of dropping out (PARDOs)?

Literature Review

Self-Determination Theory

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2017), Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals are motivated when

their fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled. This theory can examine the fulfillment of students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in alternative delivery modes.

Autonomy refers to the need to feel volitional and have a sense of choice and control over one's actions. In the context of alternative delivery modes, autonomy-supportive environments can be created by providing students with opportunities to make decisions about their learning, set goals, and engage in self-directed activities. Teachers can offer choices within the curriculum, encourage learners to express their preferences, and support their decision-making processes. When learners feel autonomous, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, engage actively in the learning process, and persist in the face of challenges (Garrido, 2023).

The need for competence involves feeling capable, effective, and successful in one's activities. In alternative delivery modes, it is important to provide learners with appropriate challenges and opportunities for skill development. Teachers can design learning tasks that are aligned with students' abilities, provide clear instructions and guidance, and offer constructive feedback to help learners develop a sense of competence. When learners experience a sense of mastery and perceive themselves as capable learners, their motivation and engagement increase.

Relatedness refers to the need for social connections, positive relationships, and a sense of belonging. In the virtual learning environment, fostering relatedness can be challenging, but it is crucial for learners' motivation and well-being. Teachers can facilitate interactions among learners, create opportunities for collaboration and peer feedback, and provide emotional support. Building a sense of community and belonging in the remote learning environment can enhance learners' motivation, engagement, and persistence.

SDT provides a framework for understanding how these psychological needs influence learners' motivation and can guide the design of effective instructional strategies and supportive environments in alternative delivery modes. The research can explore how providing autonomy-supportive environments, such as opportunities for choice and self-directed learning, influences learners' intrinsic motivation, and engagement. Additionally, the role of social connections and supportive relationships with teachers and peers in the remote learning environment can be investigated in relation to students' satisfaction of their need for relatedness.

Qualitative Phenomenological Study

Patton (2002) described a phenomenology as a research design that focuses on the essence of a lived experience. It explores the in-depth meaning of a specific phenomenon of an experience through an analysis of dialogue and reflection about its essential meaning. It ensures a thorough and comprehensive exploration of the feelings, thoughts, and sensitivities of people who experience a particular phenomenon under study. According to Salmon (2012), phenomenological designs and methodologies are a type of qualitative research that delves deeply into exploring the human science research. They attempt to establish what a certain phenomenon means and how it is experienced. In this study, phenomenology as theoretical framework is used to describe the lived experiences of elementary teachers in implementing alternative delivery mode to pupils-at-risk of dropping out. Using a Phenomenology, it aims to extract the essence of the lived experience of the elementary teachers as this is described by the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2008).

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design to delve into the lived experiences of elementary teachers involved in implementing alternative delivery modes for pupils at risk of dropping out. Phenomenology serves as both a research approach and a philosophy, aiming to investigate individuals' lived experiences concerning a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Through this approach, the researcher sought to construct detailed descriptions of how individuals comprehend and interpret the world around them (Husserl, 1997). Consequently, this design aligns seamlessly with the study's objectives, facilitating a comprehensive exploration and presentation of insights relevant to the research question.

Participants

This study involved six (6) elementary teachers based in Koronadal City, the capital of the province of South Cotabato in the Philippines, as its participants. These teachers were deemed a valuable source of information due to their direct involvement and firsthand experiences with pupils-at-risk of dropping out (PARDOs). The selection of these teachers was meticulous, ensuring that the collected data would be pertinent to addressing the research question.

The inclusion criteria guided the selection process, specifying that participants must have a minimum of five (5) years of teaching experience, possess hands-on experience in implementing alternative delivery modes for pupils-at-risk of dropping out, and be currently engaged in the implementation of alternative delivery modes in the present school year.

Adhering to Laverty's (2003) suggestion of having between five (5) and twenty-five (25) witnesses to the phenomenon, and Creswell's (2007) acknowledgment that qualitative research might achieve topic saturation with a minimum of six (6) participants, the chosen group of six (6) elementary teachers was considered sufficient for this study. Each teacher underwent an in-depth interview to provide valuable insights into the central question of the study. To safeguard their privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

Instruments

To obtain the requisite data for this study, the researcher developed a set of interview guide questions, which underwent content validation. Three experts in the field, each holding at least a master's degree and possessing experience in implementing alternative delivery modes for pupils-at-risk of dropping out, validated the interview guide. Subsequently, the researcher identified potential participants meeting the inclusion criteria. In-depth interviews were then scheduled at the participants' convenience, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes for each participant and conducted in Hiligaynon, the local language.

All collected data were treated with utmost confidentiality, accessible solely to the researcher. In adherence to ethical considerations deemed essential for this research, the participants' real names were replaced with pseudonyms during the transcription process. This meticulous approach ensured the masking and coding of participants' identities to preserve confidentiality. Additionally, participants were invited to verify the accuracy of the gathered data once it had been transcribed and analyzed, further emphasizing the commitment to ethical research practices.

Procedure

The data collected underwent transcription and analysis following the outlined steps by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007). Hiligaynon responses in the study were translated into English, assisted by three native Hiligaynon speakers. The methodology began with acquiring a comprehensive description of the phenomenon through verbatim transcription. From the interview data, a compilation of statements significant to the teachers' experienced phenomenon was generated. These significant statements were then organized into larger units of information, involving the elimination of repetitive statements and the amalgamation of overlapping ones to derive broader themes. A textural description of the teachers' experiences was crafted by synthesizing invariant meaning units and themes, accompanied by verbatim examples. The textural description was further enriched by providing a reflective analysis through imaginative variation, offering a structural description elucidating how the experiences unfolded. Ultimately, a composite description of the phenomenon was developed, integrating both the textural and structural descriptions, encapsulating the meanings and essences derived from the data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing the study, explicit informed consent was obtained from all participants, outlining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure the privacy of the participants. Furthermore, the research adhered to the principles of beneficence, ensuring that any potential benefits outweighed potential harms. The study also respected the participants' autonomy, allowing them the freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage without consequence. Additionally, efforts were made to minimize any potential biases, and the research design underwent scrutiny to uphold scientific integrity and rigor. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, emphasizing the commitment to ethical standards in the research process.

Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of collected data from the in-depth interviews, the following themes on the lived experiences of elementary teachers in the implementation of alternative delivery mode (ADM) to pupils-at-risk of dropping out (PARDOs) emerged:

Theme 1: Putting Up with the Limited Learning Resources

Teachers have expressed their frustrations on the limited learning resources in the implementation of alternative delivery mode. Though, modules are provided by the department, still they have problems in the reproduction of these materials. They are limited with modules as sole source of learning resources. Also, printing devices and other printing materials turned out to be their problem as well. Teacher B and Teacher C said:

“May ara man modules nga gi-provide na kaso ti limited lang. Amo lang na akon ma provide. Kis-a gani di ko pa ma print tanan kay walo daan ka subjects”. – Teacher B. (There are provided modules but these are limited. These are the only ones I provide. Sometimes, I can't even print all the modules for eight subjects). “Wala ko sarili ko nga printer. Nakikiprint lang ako kis-a sa akon nga upod. – Teacher C. (I do not have my own printer. I just print the modules using my co-teacher's printer.)

Similarly, in the study conducted by Mercado (2020), it was revealed that teachers have to endure the burden of reproducing these modules as required of them despite limited resources. This limitation includes printing devices and materials. Truly, teachers in the field still have problems when it comes to the availability and adequacy of resources that will supposedly aid them in the teaching and learning process.

Theme 2: Loaded with the Overlapping Roles and Responsibilities

Aside from the academic responsibilities of the teachers as class advisers, they are also given various school programs to handle. These programs require them to prepare, implement and submit various reports. A lot of activities are lined up in the school year calendar. These all add up to teachers' responsibility to facilitate the implementation of alternative delivery mode to pupils-at-risk of dropping

out. This is congruent to the study conducted by Into and Gempes (2018) which revealed that teachers feel exhausted with their multiple ancillary functions. They have expressed their frustrations on the overlapping of roles and responsibilities. Teacher E and Teacher F articulated:

“Aside sa reponsibilidad ko as adviser, damo pa gid ako ccordinatorship. Ti kis-a wala na ako time mag home visitation kag di na ko ka prepare sang mga modules para sa mga PARDOs.” – Teacher E (Aside from my advisory class, I am also given programs to hold as coordinator. So, sometimes I cannot do home visitations and I can’t prepare anymore the modules needed to be delivered to my pupils who are at risk of dropping out.) *“Ka busy pa gid tana sa amon. Di na namon bal-an ano amo unahon. Di man pwede nga pagbay-an namon ning mga programs nga gihatag sa amon sang school.”* – Teacher F. (We are preoccupied. We do not even know which task will we do first. We can just take the school programs given by the school for granted.)

Theme 3: Battling with the Travel Risks

Implementing alternative delivery mode to pupils at risk of dropping out entails teachers to do home visitations and travel from short to long distances. This also means that they are prone to accidents and other risks. As expressed by the teachers, they are worried every time they do home visitations and whenever they bring modules to the learners. Teacher A and Teacher C aired:

“Worried gid ko everytime magdul-ong ako sang modules kapin pa kay naga commute lang ako sakay sa mga scooters kay wala man ako salakyan nga akon. Di ko bal an ano pwede matabo sa akon sa dalan.” – Teacher A (I am always worried every time I bring the modules to the learners especially that I just commute and ride on with scooters since I don’t have my own vehicle.) *“One time pagdul-ong ko sang modules natumba ako sa motor kay kabudlay sa dalan.”* – Teacher C. (There was a time that I had an accident riding my motorcycle because the road was so bumpy.)

This is in accordance with the study conducted by Casilao (2020) which unveiled that teachers are obliged to distribute the learning resources to be used by the pupils in a form of modules which requires a four-hour motorcycle ride or more through rocky, muddy and bumpy roads. This life-threatening experience poses anxieties to teachers who are the frontlines of the said program.

Theme 4: Concerned with the Learning Outcome and Gains

Remote learning poses various issues and concerns when it comes to the learning outcomes of the pupils. Teachers have expressed their concerns on the learning gains of pupils under the alternative delivery mode as most of the learners do not have learning facilitators at home. Moreover, they do not have enough time in doing their academic tasks for some of them are working and with serious medical conditions. Teacher B and Teacher F voiced:

“Nabudlayan ko mag make sure nga may natun-an gid ang akon bata. Wala man sang may gatudlo sa iya sa balay.” (It is difficult for me to ensure that my pupils learn something. He does not have any learning facilitator at home.) – Teacher B. *“Kabudlay mag measure kung may natun-an ang akon bata. Kis-a di pa dayon niya matapos ang pag answer sa modules kay di man daw sya kabalo.”* – Teacher F. (It is very hard to determine if my learner had learned something. He cannot even finish the tasks in the modules because according to him he does not know how to answer.)

The same finding was found in the study of Besonia and Magnate (2022) which disclosed that teachers have concluded that the scores in their modules are not reliable as the basis of their learning. It is difficult for teachers to determine if learning really took place and that learners have gained the necessary skills and competencies needed to move to the next grade level. Moreover, there is limited mechanism for teachers to evaluate and provide feedback and formative guidance to learners.

Conclusion

In the light of the findings from the research, Alternative Delivery Mode is effective, despite its effectiveness it also encountered some problems, but these challenges have suggested solutions.

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