LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND LEARNERS IN SCIENCE AMIDST PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 pandemic has affected the educational system worldwide. Policies were created and implemented to guide the schools to offer flexible learning. Nevertheless, its implementation was partly in favor of those on the mainland. So, the author explored the lived experiences of teachers, parents, and learners in Science about their problems encountered, coping mechanisms, and perception of the learning modality in an island school. With this, an in-depth interview was employed to gather the data and was triangulated through observation and focus group discussion. Thematic analysis revealed that the complexity of the topics, the conduct of experiments and its materialization, and the unreliability scores of the learners were Science teachers' problems; their coping mechanisms were teacher-parent communication, additional learning resources, and house-to-house visitation; their perceptions disclosed that the learning modality is difficult. Participants' perception of the modular approach is attributed to their problems and coping mechanisms. Hence, the Department of Education may provide professional opportunities such as seminars, workshops, and training to enhance the skills of the teachers needed and relevant to the current setting of education.

Keywords: Lived Experiences, Coping Mechanism, Problems Encountered, Perception

INTRODUCTION

Education is resilient and lenient to cope with the global issues which may hamper its functionality. Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) outbreak has shaken it, posing both opportunities and challenges (Moralista & Oducado, 2020). Its impact resulted in the closure of schools and universities at all levels, which will result in learning inequality, drop-outs, mental health issues, and the closure of private schools (Fontanos et al., 2021).

Educators have shifted to online platforms to reach students; webinars became a temporary classroom, parents were called for monitoring at home, and students got deprived of social interaction among peers. The World Health Organization advised educators and students to conduct alternative learning due to the COVID-19 outbreak to mitigate school cancellation of classes. Furthermore, the mandate provides guiding principles and delivery of online classes and approaches to be given by stakeholders like teachers and parents (World Bank, 2020).

However, according to Phan & Dang (2017), training, attitude, technical competence, time constraints, pedagogy, and methodology were significant distance learning education elements. Likewise, the study conducted by Ventayin (2018) on the readiness of DepEd teachers for online teaching showed that despite their limited experiences in distance education, such as technical skills, time management, knowledge, and attitude in online education, they were still able to cope with the trends in distance learning.

The sudden shift to online learning created a hot debate in the Philippines, citing the poor living conditions of the learners. Magsambol (2020) cited an apparent gap between those who can and cannot afford the new education platform's resources. DepEd's different learning platforms were no studies contemplating the island school. Thus, this study sought to dig into the lived experiences of the teachers, parents, and learners in Science despite the government's plans and programs to address the challenges brought by the pandemic.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to: 1) to explore the lived experiences of the teachers, parents, and learners in one of the island schools in Carles, Iloilo, Philippines regarding the problems encountered, coping mechanisms, and perceptions towards learning modality in Science classes.

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study ascertained particular phenomena or the appearance of things as lived experiences (Rodriguez & Smith, 2020). It sought to understand particular phenomena by focusing on the experiences and perceptions of those who live it (Iversen et al., 2018). Furthermore, Qutoshi (2018) said that it was an intellectual engagement in interpretations and meaning-making to understand the world of human beings on a conscious level. Phenomenology was utilized in this study to explore the participants' lived experiences during the pandemic regarding the problems encountered, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of the learning modality in Science.

This study utilized twelve purposively selected participants. The number was enough to gather the intended data, since phenomenological studies require fewer than ten interviews (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). However, the required number of participants should depend on when saturation was reached (Saunders et al., 2017). They were composed of four Science teachers, four parents, and four learners of one of the island schools in Carles, Iloilo, Philippines, during the Academic Year 2020-2021. In the case of the learners, the parents' consent was secured since they were minors. The participants were chosen because they were directly exposed to the phenomenon, shared the same experiences, and were considered good informants.

In data gathering, letters were sent to the different offices of the local Inter-agency task force, barangay chairman, and learners' parents seeking their authorization to allow the interview formally after the participants were identified. The researchers commenced the in-depth interview after the permission was secured. The participants were oriented on the purpose of the study and were informed that the whole process was recorded. The interview is conducted to uncover in-depth details of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Guion, Diehl & McDonald, 2011). Also, observation (Price, 2017) and focus group discussion were adopted to bring out a deeper understanding and essence of the participants' attitudes and perceptions, knowledge, experiences, and practices shared in interaction with different people (Bhatia, 2019). Prescribed health protocols were observed throughout the triangulation approaches.

In data analysis, this study utilized a simplified version of Hycner's (1999) explication process for phenomenological interview analysis, which involved different phases (Fredman, 2017). These were as follows: 1) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, 2) delineating units of meaning, 3) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, 4) summarizing each interview, validating and modifying where necessary, and 5) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Lived Experiences of the Teachers in Science

Printed learning modules have become the preferred modality in public schools. Teachers bear the burden because they are required to reproduce these modules despite limited resources (Mercado, 2020).

They are also obligated to distribute these learning modules, which in some cases may necessitate a four-hour motorcycle ride across uneven terrain (Casilao, 2020) and rivers (Aglibot et al., 2020). Some teachers reported that they were busier while attempting to instruct their home-schooled children (Strauss, 2020). Thus, more problems are expected to arise. Nevertheless, teachers as they are, coping mechanisms are anywhere. They have to choose what is best available despite the difficulty they experience.

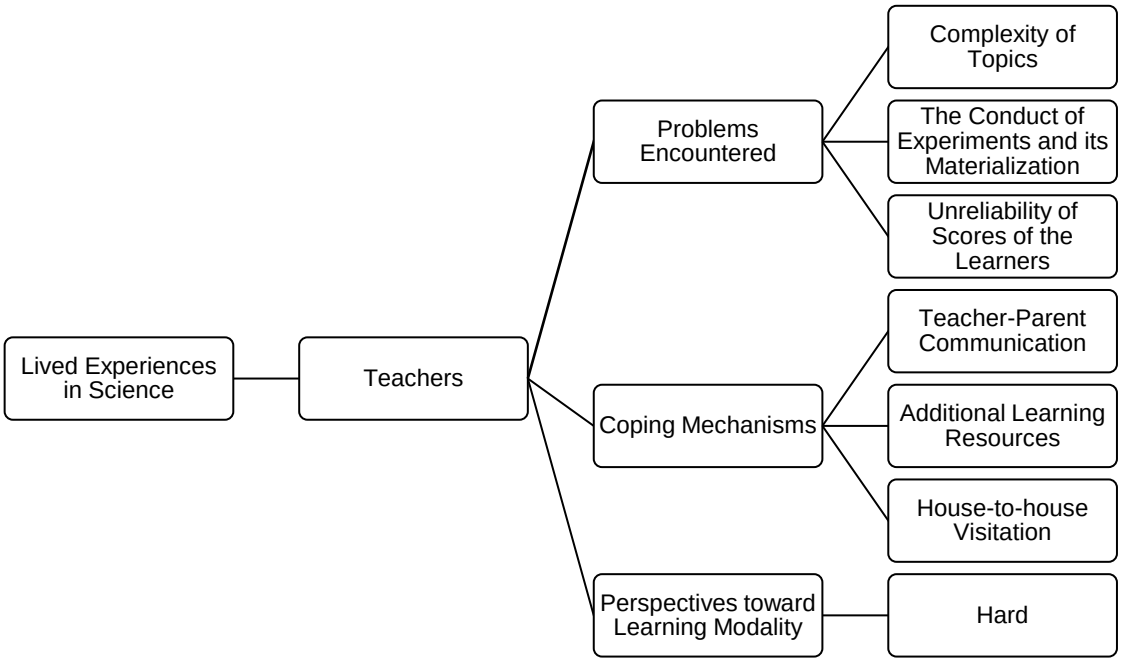

Figure 1. Thematic Representations of Science Teachers' Lived Experiences

Figure 1 exhibits significant themes of the lived experiences of science teachers regarding their problems, coping mechanisms, and perceptions toward the modular approach.

1.1. Problems Encountered in the New Normal

1.1.1. Complexity of the Topics

One of the primary reasons for teachers' stress is a concern for students (Nyambongi, 2014). Many educators feel morally responsible for their learners' well-being. The vulnerable group has difficulty understanding their lessons when teachers are not present, which consists of students who are weak in learning (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). There are some concepts in Science that are difficult to define. This makes it challenging for teachers to provide learners with focused, customized assistance (Hatch, 2018). Parents alone could not provide the explanations needed in the module because many parents have low self-esteem, and others have not had academic achievement to help their children (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parents who did not have academic success may have a poor perception.

1.1.2. The Conduct of Experiments and its Materialization

Laboratory activities play a significant role in supporting scientific learning fields by allowing students to gain technical skills through experiments and providing an opportunity to have

a more substantial understanding of the content (Aljuhani et al., 2018). An experiment has shown that children whose parents tutor perform better in school than those whose parents do not help them (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Thus, conducting it during this pandemic was challenging without the guidance of the teachers and the risks it might trigger. Lack of resources has always posed a challenge to the critical indicators of the school, teachers, and students (Tus, 2021). It specifically restricts their ability to engage in certain activities. Some parents would disregard it due to money matters, availability of materials in the locale, and comprehension of the prescriptions.

1.1.3. Unreliability of Scores of the Learners

Teachers have concluded that scores are not reliable as the basis of learners' understanding considering the penmanship transpired in the activity sheets. They were unsure if the learners answered the modules in this modality because they sensed parents were the ones who did it or if not, anyone did it for them. Many parents guide and support their children's learning, and the extent and degree of support differ considerably (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Because all learners' assignments and examinations are completed at home, it is difficult for teachers to determine the authenticity of the work and the actual learning that is taking place. Lee and Bowen (2006, in Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) cited cultural norms, insufficient financial resources, and lack of educational attainment as barriers to parental involvement in school.

1.2. Coping Mechanisms in the New Normal

1.2.1. Teacher-Parent Communication

The level of family participation in the learners' education has become more in demand and pertinent than ever before (Dollanganger, 2021). The new normal in Philippine education relies on the students' and their respective families' abilities to sustain quality education to a limited extent to almost non-existent supervision from teachers (Marquez et al., 2020). This made parents problematic because not all had the knowledge and skills to help and assist their children. Teachers need to openly communicate with the parents on various platforms as a coping mechanism. Teachers who converse with parents are happier and more confident in their abilities as educators. Building parent partnerships through communication is more than just a nice to have. Teachers should view it as a critical responsibility (Waterford.org, 2021). UNICEF (2020a) assumed that communication could reinforce parents' roles in supporting their children since parents and guardians serve as in-person surrogates for the classroom teacher in a virtual instruction scenario.

1.2.2. Additional Learning Resources

Distance learning programs lack mechanisms for teachers to assess and provide feedback and formative guidance to students (UNICEF, 2020b). Teachers were forced to pivot and change their instruction and curriculum to distance learning and connect with students virtually (Anderson et al., 2021). Thus, innovations and supplements were needed to provide more elaboration and visuals. Teacher-participants initiated supplemental and additional learning materials to ease the learners' burden, for it is a critical technique for effective teaching and learning. The value of high-quality, appropriate instructional resources in teaching and learning can be shown in their practical use in the classroom (Tety, 2016). Hence, participants made videos to supplement the learners and the parents to aid the problem they faced in the science lessons. More so, they anticipated and reconsidered those parents who had no gadgets and internet connectivity by giving printed materials that were shortened and made accessible.

1.2.3. House-to-House Visitation

Teachers should continue to be involved in guiding their students and supporting parents/caregivers during school closures. As a result, a combination of self-learning and teacher-guided modalities is necessary (UNICEF, 2020a). Thus, participants held house-to-house visitations to assess parents' and the learners' problems despite the risks brought by the virus. It is to

socialize and build positive family-teacher relationships. It includes sharing information about learners' progress and allows teachers to develop a deeper level of empathy with learners whose home life was in some way lacking (Johnson & Hannon, 2014). Also, it gives learners special consideration that still cannot access the internet (Pe Dangle, 2020). In light, participants would be able to identify the problems they faced in the science module, which was a way to clear things out, give advice, and design additional instructional materials.

1.3. Perception towards Learning Modality

Hard. A modular approach relies on students' and their respective families' capabilities to sustain quality education (Marquez et al., 2020). It also challenges teachers to provide appropriate and practical learning alternatives. However, with their innovations to help both the learners and the parents, they could not deny that they met and will meet problems. Some teachers had to cross rivers and pass the rocky, muddy, or uneven terrain in some cases (Casilao, 2020). Other educational institutions were forced to halt their remote learning activities as not everyone had access to the necessary facilities (Bernardo, 2020). Also, many teachers cannot afford to buy the necessary equipment for online learning (UNESCO, 2020). With this, the perception of the teacher-participants was hard toward modular learning. More so, they felt that this modality was laborious and time-consuming. Pe Dangle (2020) cited in their study that teachers have many paper works; papers to check and record.

2. Lived Experiences of the Parents in Science

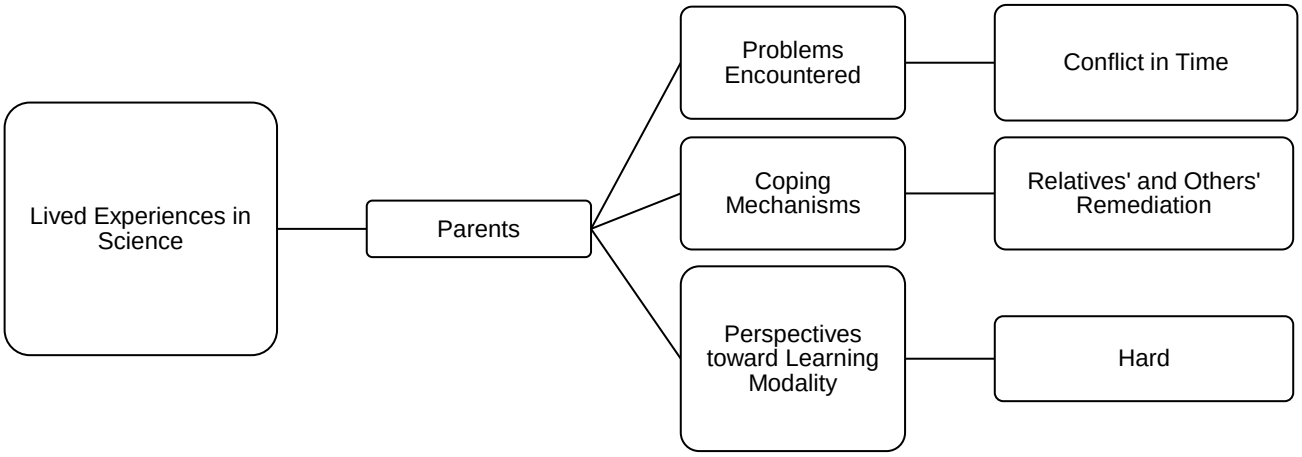

Figure 2. Thematic Representations of Parents' Lived Experiences

Parents are the hope of successful and effective learning because they facilitate the instructional needs of their children. This new setup for them adds to their usual functions as heads of the family, which needs time, patience, and knowledge. Also, it is an additional

burden because they need to ensure that learners are attending to their schoolwork while doing other household duties.

Figure 2 displays significant themes of the lived experiences of parents regarding their problems, coping mechanisms, and perceptions toward the modular approach.

2.1. Problems Encountered in the New Normal

Conflict in Time. Parents do everything in enormously difficult circumstances to minimize and mitigate the significant disruption to learning caused by school closures. When parents work to encourage and assist their children, there is better learning. (Teacher Task Force, n.d) for they play an imperative role in the learning process of learners (Pe Dangle, 2020). The new normal demands require parents to play a multifaceted role in minimizing the impact of the pandemic on their children's academic performance and well-being (Krentz et al., 2021). Schools alone cannot meet all of a child's developmental needs; parents' active participation is required. However, parents struggle to balance responsibilities (Ogurlu et al., 2020). With schools, they have become full-time childcare providers and home-school teachers, even as they try to meet their work responsibilities (Krentz et al., 2021). This has given a strenuous routine to parents working from home and simultaneously taking the responsibility that their children's learning process continues seamlessly.

2.2. Coping Mechanisms in the New Normal

Relatives' and Others' Assistance. Parents and guardians perceive this modality as an additional burden, for it doubles their responsibilities aside from their work and household chores. To cope with the situation, since not all of them possess the knowledge and skills needed, asking for the help of relatives and other people is seen to be an alternative solution. Since learners are studying at home, they can easily ask their family members for assistance regarding their lessons (Nicholls, 2020). The learners' family members, relatives, and friends play a vital role in education today. Siblings are at the priority of the list in helping the learners answer the modules, followed by friends and classmates (Pe Dangle, 2020). More families are forming pandemic learning pods, which has resulted in the hiring of private group tutors to help their children (Nguyen, 2020).

2.3. Perspective towards Learning Modality

Hard. Several studies have found that students with engaged and supportive parents had higher academic attainment. However, the use of modular learning during the pandemic challenged them. Many faced different problems and used various strategies to balance their responsibilities at home. They described difficulties in balancing responsibilities, learner motivation, accessibility, and learning outcomes (Ogurlu et al., 2020). This transition has added a burden on several low-income families, whose members are forced to balance their time between household chores, clocking in required work hours, and guiding their children in their schooling, among many other things (Dollanganger, 2020). They were used by the traditional approach in teaching, where teachers initiated the learning process. This modality was hard because some of them did not have enough time to guide their kids due to work and other responsibilities (Pe Dangle, 2020).

3. Lived Experiences of the Learners in Science

The effect of COVID-19 pandemic was the risk of getting the right to quality education. The use of modular learning was not a guarantee of acquiring the expected competencies considering the diversity of the learners. Thus, studying during this time was challenging for learner-participants, especially in Science. This includes completing their modules, learning the content, and answering the activities.

Figure 3 presents significant themes of the lived experiences of learners regarding their problems, coping mechanisms, and perceptions toward the modular approach

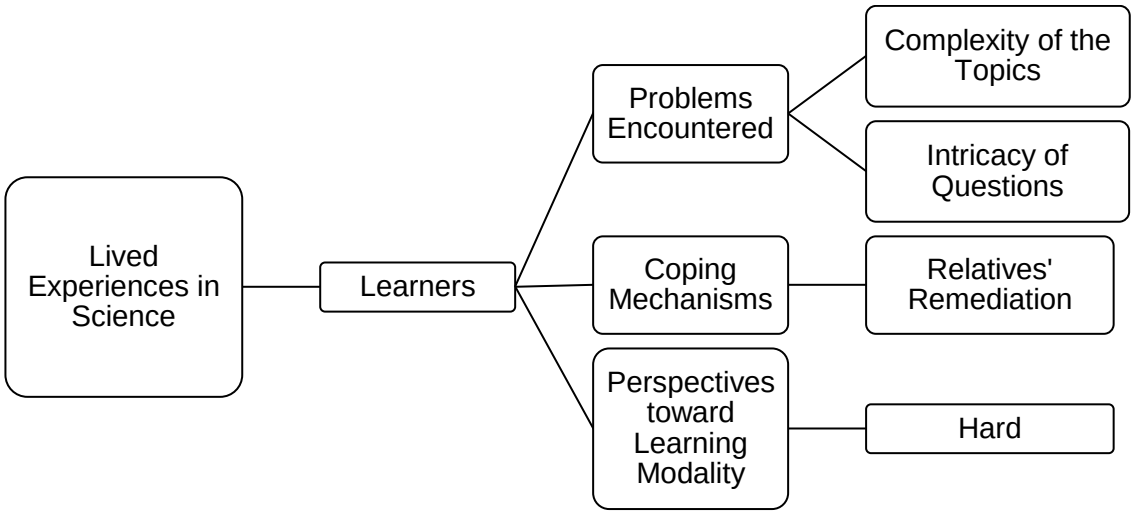

Figure 3. Thematic Representations of Learners' Lived Experiences

3.1. Problems Encountered in the New Normal

3.1. Complexity of the Topics

Students have difficulty understanding the lessons because of difficulty comprehending the lessons due to physical and mental exhaustion. This was associated with a lack of sleep and time to answer the modules (Pe Dangle, 2020). They helped their parents to earn money. They cut and packed the scallops harvested by their fathers, which divided their attention and staying late at night. This was consistent with the findings of Pokhrel and Chhetri (2020), that students are involved in farm activities such as agriculture, cattle care, and household chores. Students requested that exams be moved to the afternoon because they had to work on the fields in the morning.

The presence of learners' family provides ease to understand the complex topics in Science. However, not all parents had degrees or finished college. According to Ogurlu et al. (2020), a lack of parents knowledge was a barrier to learning during the pandemic. On the other hand, if their parents were degree holders, they were busy in their respective work (Azubuike & Aina, 2020) or or could not afford the cost of supporting their child's learning.

3.2. Intricacy of Questions

Most of the participants experienced difficulty with questions in Science modules. Pe Dangle (2020) found that 90% of the learner-participants had difficulty answering it. This problem was cited because of the terminologies and the level of questioning. This issue could be anchored on participants' academic performance. Learners complained about lengthy readings, and some of the terms were unfamiliar, which precipitated their inability to answer the questions independently (Pe Dangle, 2020). It is evident that there were innovations from the schools to reach out to the learners in case they had problems with the questions in the activities. Thus, communication between students and teachers is critical to ensure everyone understands what needs to be done, whom, and how (UNICEF, 2020a).

3.3. Coping Mechanisms in the New Normal

3.3.1. Relatives' Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown affected the academic performance of most learners, 96.7% with varying degrees (Mahdy, 2020). The level of difficulty among the participants' problems lessened due to the presence of their relatives. According to Azubuike & Aina (2020), 83% of the parents affirmed that they were actively helping their children learn during the pandemic. When parents and children collaborate in learning activities, bonding between parents and children increases as they can spend much more time together (Bhamani et al., 2020). However, not all parents were always there for their children during these challenging times in education because they were busy attending family's needs. Hence, the siblings (Pe Dangle, 2020) are at the top of the list in helping the learners answer the modules. This was seen as participants' immediate aid if tough lessons and complex activities were. Consequently, this positively impacts the completion and submission of modules on time.

3.4. Perspective towards Learning Modality

Hard. Modular learning modality was not new in the system of basic education. It had been utilized by limited schools in the country. In today's health crisis, this kind of learning modality has been an option to continue the education of the learners without compromising their lives. The commencement of the academic year has brought several arguments on its effect on mental health and the possibility of ineffective learning. During the interview with the participants, most of them perceived this modality as hard. This was confirmed in the study of (Pe Dangle, 2020), where they revealed that most learners are having difficulty with this new learning modality. They preferred face-to-face sessions because they believed that with the presence of the teachers, they could learn well. They saw a better understanding of if there was a teacher who was teaching them; they could play, and it was not dull.

CONCLUSION

Participants still face problems despite the innovations to help them deliver learning. Their coping strategies are not sufficient due to the scarcity of resources available in the locale. Thus, this modular learning brings difficulties to them.

The most affected by this modality is the learners. They are the ones who must possess competencies and must acquire on-point learning. They cannot focus on their modules in Science despite the presence of their parents and relatives who assist them in case they have questions or concerns. This is brought about by environmental and psychological disturbances that arise in their respective homes. Therefore, learning during this pandemic is contingent on the combined efforts of learner, parents and teachers.

Perception in the modular approach is attributed to the problems they encountered and the coping mechanisms they used. Thus, communication, cooperation, and collaboration may be established to strengthen programs relevant to the successful delivery of learning.

RECOMMENDATION

Participants may initiate regulating efforts to cope with the current situation of education in the country. They may collaborate through systematized communication to recalibrate and strengthen existing policies with local officials' intervention.

The school may provide empowerment and opportunities to motivate and uplift teachers' morale to calibrate pedagogical approaches to facilitate the concerns of the parents and learners in the module.

The Department of Education may program professional opportunities such as seminars, workshops, and training to enhance the skills of the teachers needed and relevant to the current setting of education. Also, they may design alternative learning modalities to provide learners with contextualized enrichments to increase and sustain their motivation to study amidst pandemic.

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