

Stories of the Challenges of Novice or Beginning Teachers: A Glimpse of Three Big Elementary Schools in Valencia City Bukidnon

CHRISTINE H. BELARMA

Teacher I

Master of Arts in Educational Management

Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc

christine.belarma@deped.gov.ph

Abstract — The novice teachers who were used as the sample were those who are part of the whole population of novice teachers in the three (3) biggest public elementary schools of Davao City who have been in the teaching profession for a period of less than three years: Kapitan Tomas Monteverde Elementary School, Palma Gil Elementary School, and Magallanes Elementary School. A sampling of 5 teachers per school proved to be relevant in deducing the lived experiences of the novice teacher in the public elementary schools identified. Several emotions and frustrations faced by first year teachers emerged from the data collected. In the narratives shared, very positively anxious teachers presented their enthusiasm and eagerness to get into the classroom and teach. From the data, once they get into the classroom different experiences began to emerge. These experiences were categorized into five themes; lack of support and opportunities; time management, curriculum adjustments and professional overload; discipline issues; and rollercoaster of emotions. The processes for coping focused on trying to either prepare to be proactive and take actions to increase trust in their abilities, or to postpone and use a reactive strategy to cope with conflicting emotions. This strategy involved two coping mechanisms: proactive and reactive coping mechanisms. Several new teachers suggested that stricter selection to reduce students who do not intend to become teachers. It was said that the initial prerequisites for working as a teacher, such as communication and presentation skills, should already be acquired before the start of higher education and the existence of these abilities should be checked as soon as the candidates apply for teacher training.

Keywords — *Novice Teachers, Experiences, Coping Mechanisms, Insights, Development*

I. Introduction

The Philippine government has consistently pursued reforms aimed at improving teacher quality. Through CHED Memorandum Order No. 52, section 2007, and DepEd Order No. 32, 2009, the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) were institutionalized as a framework for teacher quality. It was created as part of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA). It was made possible using learning perspectives from programs such as the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM), the Strengthening Visayas Education (STRIVE) project, and the Third Elementary Education Project (TEEP). The Department of Education is currently adapting the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST).

While numerous research studies have been conducted on the reasons why teachers leave education, there is a dearth of research on the problematic experiences of beginning teachers as told through reflection, and there are also few educational researchers who have examined the difficulties faced by newly hired teachers in the Department of Education.

As new graduate of teacher education and having taken the licensure exams for teachers, while waiting for an assignment in the public elementary sector, I have decided to conduct this study on novices or beginning teachers to improve my understanding of novice teachers and in the hope of getting relevant lessons when my teaching stint comes. I have chosen three big elementary schools in Davao City. being resident of the locality, namely: Kapitan Tomas Monteverde Elementary School, Palma Gil Elementary School, and Magallanes Elementary School.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the most difficult experiences encountered by beginning teachers and the effect these difficulties may have on beginning teachers' commitment to keep their passion in the teaching profession.

The study mainly focused on the challenges beginning teachers face when they enter the field of education. It utilized the qualitative research with hermeneutic phenomenology as an approach.

The study seeks answers to the following specific questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of novices or beginning teachers as regards to their first three years in teaching?
2. What emerged as coping mechanism of novice or beginning teachers as to the challenges they encounter in teaching?
3. What lessons can novices or beginning teachers share to help the beginning teacher?

Various people have defined the status of novice teachers in different ways. Jensen (2021) define novice teachers as those having two years or less of teaching experience. Kim and Roth (2019) in their study on novice teachers, and their acquisition of work-related information, define the term novice teachers as teachers with less than five years' teaching experience. Huberman (2019) conceived novice teachers as those with less than three years of teaching experience. As noted, in this study, novice teachers are those who have served for three years and less.

Novice teachers require assistance to meet their expectations, which draw on their past experience, self-confidence, and their emotional state (Chen & Fang, 2018; Redmond & Hite, 2019). In fact, Bartell (2021) holds that, no matter how much initial preparation is provided to novice teachers, they are never fully prepared for the classroom realities as they join the profession. Novice teachers in their first year not only grapple with how to teach effectively, but also how to learn to teach (Wildman, Niles, Milagro & Mc Laughlin, 2019).

Birchmore (2019) argues that many novice teachers in their first year find themselves in reality isolated, not having been assigned a mentor, with little or no professional training to develop teaching skills, and having very limited contact with their colleagues. The experiences of the first years of teaching, according to Dollase (2019), are notoriously difficult for novice teachers. Further, Dollase (2019) mentions that novice teachers may experience conflict between their expectations and their actual experiences as new teachers. Similarly, Huling-Austin (2021) states that novice teachers' experiences in the first teaching assignments are often quite different from what they expected them to be when they were education majors in colleges. Novice teachers embark on their first teaching assignments with highly idealized perceptions of teaching, which can cause serious disillusionment (Gordon & Maxey, 2022).

To succeed, especially in the first years of teaching, novice teachers are required to develop in many ways, such as in knowledge and preparation, and in taking risks with new ways of teaching (Leaman, 2022). However, novices should teach only subjects they are qualified in (Darby-Hobbs, 2019). Feiman-Nemser (2022) observed that teaching as a demanding profession may be fully learned on the job. There are no colleges that can teach a new teacher how to use knowledge in specific situations, as these are mediated by their lived experiences.

Several people have defined induction of novice teachers. For some, it is a process of initiating new teachers into their role, both as teachers and as members of a community (Kessels, 2019). Tickle (2019) views it as a systematic and sensitive provision for future professional development of new entrants; while Levine (2020) perceives it as a socialization into the profession and school culture. For Birchmore and Birchmore (2019), induction refers to a process of formal structured support for the beginning teacher, which entails a system process, embedded in a healthy school climate that supports new teachers' personal and professional needs. These definite that is, it involves socialization of the novice teachers into the teaching endeavor.

According to Witmer (2022), it is important for all stakeholders to provide novice teachers with induction and support in their schools, so that the novice teachers may be in a position to develop a strong sense of confidence. This will help them carry out their duties in the schools. Smith and Ingersoll (2021) posit that novice teachers should receive support and induction from the experienced teachers they find in their schools when they join the profession. If the novice teachers are provided with adequate and appropriate support and induction, this will contribute to retaining them in the teaching profession.

Another aspect related to teacher loss is discipline. Adelabu (2020) and Agezo (2019) examined the impact of student discipline on teacher motivation and expressed the sentiment that student discipline affects teachers' enthusiasm, love, and passion for their profession, leaving them vulnerable to attraction to other professions.

Calliari (2019) in his study noted the problem of teachers in their first years and he tried to express these problems of beginning teachers with questions and answers, such as: "Why did not

you tell me this before? How can I know I did have to do this! No, I did not know that I had to do this! I had no clue that teaching was this demanding”. Yalçinkaya (2022) investigated the problems of beginning teachers and noted the basic problems as follows: lack of experience; pressures on beginning teachers; trying to complete more tasks than one is able to, fear of inspection, and adaptation to school and its environment.

This study draws on the Whole Teacher Professional Development (WTPD) approach, alternatively, referred to, as the Gestalt (Korthagen, 2021, Korthagen, 2019). The Gestalt as a theoretical framework provides a departure from the traditional approach of professional development that speaks primarily to teachers’ acquisition of knowledge and skills. The Gestalt or the WTPD emphasizes and addresses the salience of promoting all aspects of a teacher’s development which encompasses attitudes, knowledge, and practice.

Duff and Marriot, (2019) argue that educators should develop as lifelong learners, reflective thinkers and ethical leaders exemplifying the ideals of literacy and scholarship. Korthagen, (2021) has grouped the characteristics under three categories, namely, skill, concern for others and concern for self. To understand the impact of complete professional development on novice teachers. in view of the Gestalt objectives, teacher’s quality become central and topic in the teacher education and education milieu. Numerous research studies indicate that the key to increasing teachers’ proficiency in teaching is their continuing development and learning through effective professional development (Gurevich, Stein, & Gorev, (2019).

Effective professional development updates teachers’ content knowledge, exposes them to new teaching strategies and methods, sustains their teaching effectiveness, and prompts continuous growth (Kothagen & Vasalos, 2022). Novice teachers might face challenges of workplace adjustment, poor mentoring and absence of professional collegiality which might inadvertently delay their achievement for the required professionalism development.

II. Methodology

Qualitative-interpretive research is based on the assumptions that human beings, like novice teachers can be understood from within their experiences of their school teaching. Thus, the interpretative qualitative research approach in the context of this study provided the researchers with multiple perspectives from the novice teachers who are the research participants.

In this study, a purposeful sampling of 15 novice teachers was employed. The purposive sample was chosen because novice teachers are likely informed of the challenges, they face related to school functions (Maree, 2020; Botha & Rens, 2018). Of the fifteen (15) newly qualified teachers who participated in the research study ten (10) are female and five (5) are male teachers with a mean age of twenty-five of and average teaching experience of three years.

In this study, purposeful sampling was employed, which, according to Cresswell (2013), refers to the selection of individuals who possess the characteristics or attributes of interest to the study. For purposeful sampling to yield the expected results, I selected individuals and sites that were conducive to exploring the lived experiences of novice teachers (Cresswell, 2013).

In this study, the novice teachers who were used as the sample were those who are part of the whole population of novice teachers in the three (3) biggest public elementary schools of Davao City who have been in the teaching profession for a period of less than three years: Kapitan Tomas Monteverde Elementary School, Palma Gil Elementary School, and Magallanes Elementary School. The novice teachers who were used as a sample for the study represent only novice teachers. Not all the teachers could be used in the study, therefore sampling of 5 teachers per school proved to be relevant in deducing the lived experiences of the novice teacher in the public elementary schools identified.

To engage with novice teachers' lived experience in the teaching profession, I employed semi-structured interviews and observations as data collection or production methods. I employed in-depth interviews for data production in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation; and to explore areas for further investigation. Semi-structured interviews are usually considered the sole data source used in qualitative research projects (Adams, McIvain, Lacy, Magsi, Crabtree, Yenny & Sitorious, 2022). I scheduled the interviews well in advance to prepare the novice teachers for the interviews.

To analyze data I used thematic analysis. In any research study that is conducted, the researcher has the sole responsibility of ensuring that the aspect of confidentiality is held in high regard. Thematic analysis is considered of great benefit in any research study because of its flexibility. There are two types of qualitative analytic methods used by researchers. These are concerned with a particular theoretical position (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2019), and they are also considered interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2022). The second type, according to Aronson (2018) and Roulston (2019), addresses the methods that are believed to be fully dependent on the theory of epistemology. These may also be used over a wider range of theoretical and epistemological approaches.

III. Results and Discussion

Several emotions and frustrations faced by first year teachers emerged from the data collected. In the narratives shared, very positively anxious teachers presented their enthusiasm and eagerness to get into the classroom and teach. From the data, once they get into the classroom different experiences began to emerge. These experiences were categorized into five themes; *lack of support and opportunities; time management, curriculum adjustments and professional overload; discipline issues; and rollercoaster of emotions.*

The processes for coping focused on trying to either prepare to be proactive and take actions to increase trust in their abilities, or to postpone and use a reactive strategy to cope with conflicting emotions. This strategy involved two coping mechanisms: *doubt about ability and trust in ability*.

Strategies for coping of novice teachers. The participants discussed coping in detail terms of how they had coped with challenges, but also how they anticipated coping in the future when they had become teachers. These strategies were described as either proactive or reactive (Blase, 2019). Proactive strategies strive to change situations and conditions, while reactive strategies are used to maintain a situation and provide protection against change.

Two general lessons were shared by novice teachers to help incoming new teachers: *lessons for improving teaching arrangements, and lessons for improving courses*.

Analysis

Several teachers suggested that admissions to teacher training could be gained through stricter selection to reduce the number of drop-outs and students who do not intend to become teachers. It was said that the initial prerequisites for working as a teacher, such as communication and presentation skills, should already be acquired before the start of higher education and the existence of these abilities should be checked as soon as the candidates apply for teacher training.

It was also pointed out that instead of groups of students from different curriculums, it would be more beneficial in seminars and workshops to study together with students who have the same curriculum.

Novice teachers who participated in the study expressed their opinion that a number of older subjects in the curriculum needed general updates and refreshments. It was thought that lecturers could incorporate new materials, more practical assignments, more active learning methods, invite practitioners to speak, and create opportunities for discussion and deeper thinking.

It was also suggested that, to some extent, the lecturers themselves could regularly teach lessons in a school. Subjects that were considered too voluminous, difficult, or boring were recommended to be taught in smaller parts or at a later stage of the studies and alternating with practice.

Novice teachers suggested that teacher training should give a realistic overview of teachers' work. To achieve this goal, the various tasks of teachers, such as classroom management, assessment, feedback, event organization, project participation, documentation, field trips, and meetings should be explained.

IV. Conclusion

Novice teachers enter the field of education with a desire to succeed; however, they possess a range of undeveloped instructional skills and strategies to meet students' needs (Curry, Web & Latham, 2019). The instructional demands of teaching and managing professional duties during the early stages of a teacher's career can be an overwhelming experience leading to novice teachers resigning. Implications for practice exist at the district and school levels. For school districts to address teacher attrition, a focus on the role of instructional coaches may be critical in reducing barriers to novice teachers' success within the first year of teaching and beyond. School districts should continue to allocate resources for instructional coaching support, specifically in Title I schools, where a higher percentage of novice teachers work, ensuring allocation of instructional coaches in every school is essential when supporting novice teachers' needs. Based on the novice teachers' perceptions, the study confirmed that novice teachers found the instructional coaching support a critical part of becoming equipped with the instructional teaching strategies needed to be successful. Two themes emerged from the study based on the novice teachers' lived experiences. Common themes among novice teachers' lived experiences and perceptions found in the study included (1) first-year success attributed to instructional support and (2) a collaborative work environment existed as a form of support.

At the school level, an intentional alignment of instructional coaching support is needed to prevent the development of poor instructional practices in the classroom within the first semester of teaching. The novice teachers in this study found value from the side-by-side instructional coaching. The novice teachers perceived support from the instructional coach as a positive experience and felt confident in transferring the knowledge gained to instructional practices in the classroom. The perceptions derived from how the novice teachers felt when they worked with the instructional coach. School leaders should prioritize instructional coaching support for novice teachers to ensure engagement in instructional practices and to ensure novice teachers know what is expected of them in the classroom as they support their students.

Novice teachers in this study also benefited from instructional support received from other colleagues such as administrators and grade-level peers, creating a collaborative work environment. The collaborative working environment met the professional needs of the novice teachers through incorporating professional development, modeling instructional expectations, observing lessons, and providing feedback, lesson planning, and serving as a knowledgeable resource for teachers' questions and concerns, as novice teachers transitioned into their roles as teachers. Novice teachers in the study perceived support from grade-level peers as valuable collaboration when discussing instructional strategies and modeling lessons for one another to determine the best approach to support students' needs.

Based on the themes that emerged from the study, school leaders should establish and implement an instructional coaching framework to support novice teachers during the school year. Novice teachers in this study attributed their first-year success, an increase in teacher confidence,

and knowledge gained, to the instructional support received during the first semester of teaching. The findings suggested school leaders should consider having instructional coaches implement an instructional coaching cycle with novice teachers. Kraft, Blazar and Hogan (2018) described an example of instructional coaching cycle activities recommended to support novice teachers: (a) individualized—coaching sessions are one-on-one; (b) intensive—coaches and teachers interact at least every couple of weeks; (c) sustained—teachers receive coaching over an extended period of time; (d) context specific—teachers are coached on their practices within the context of their own classroom; and (e) focused—coaches work with teachers to engage in deliberate practice of specific skills.

Many of the novice teachers who mentioned a lack of understanding of the teaching profession pointed out that their mentors and colleagues supported them a lot and helped them overcome thoughts about quitting their teaching job. It can be concluded that effective support systems for novice teachers make up for the inadequacies of teacher training and effectively help cope with the tasks and problems of teachers. On the other hand, it can also be concluded that novice teachers, who face a variety of unexpected responsibilities and difficulties at a new job, and are not sufficiently supported, will soon leave the profession. Previous studies have had similar results (DeAngelis, 2019). Therefore, it is certainly important to pay attention to improving the competence of mentor teachers.

Educational institutions should also consider giving the responsibilities of a mentor only to those people who are willing to accept it. Because of the importance of the topic, the author believes it is important to consistently conduct research in order to ensure more effective work adaptation and retention of novice teachers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Jensen, B., Sandoval-Hernandez, Knoll, S., & Gonzale, Z. (2021). The experiences of new teachers: Results from TALIS 2008. OECD. Retrieved March 21, 2016, from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264120952-en>.
- [2] Kim, M., Roth, M.-W., & Thom, J. (2019). Children's gestures and the embodied knowledge of geometry. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 9, 207-238.
- [3] Huberman, M. (2019). *The lives of teachers*. London: Teachers College.
- [4] Chen, Y.-Y., & Fang, W. (2018). The moderating effect of impression management on the organizational politics-performance relationship. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 79(3), 263–277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9379-3>
- [5] Redmond, B.F. & Hite, Z.A. (2019). Expectancy theory. Retrieved July 1, 2016, from <https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/Expectancy+Theory+Overview>
- [6] Bartell, C. (2021). Shaping teacher induction policy in California. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 22(4):27-43
- [7] Wildman, T.M., Niles, R.A., Milagro, S.G., & Mc Laughlin. (2019). Teaching and Learning to teach: The two roles of beginning teachers. *Elementary School Journal*, 89(4): 471-493.

- [8] Birchmore, D.L., & Birchmore, S.T. (2019). A multifaceted approach to teacher induction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26:1006-1014.
- [9] Gordon, S.P., & Maxey, S. (2022). How to help beginning teachers succeed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- [10] Leaman, L. (2022). *The naked teacher: How to survive your first five years in teaching*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- [11] Darby-Hobbs, L. (2019). Teaching out-of-field: Factors shaping identities of secondary science and mathematics. *Teaching Science*, 58(1):21-29.
- [12] Feiman-Nemser, S. (2022). Keeping good teachers: What new teachers need to learn. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8): 25-29.
- [13] Kessels, C. (2019). The Influence of induction programs on beginning teachers' well-being and professional development. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Leiden University Graduate School of Teaching.
- [14] Tickle, L. (2019). *Teaching Induction: The way ahead*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- [15] Levine, B.B. (2020). Lives of teachers: Update on a longitudinal case study. *Teacher Education Quarterly Summer*, 2020:29-47.
- [16] Witmer, M.M. (2022).. The fourth r in education: Relationships: The Clearing House, 78(5).
- [17] Ingersoll, R.M., & Smith, T.M. (2021). The wrong solution to the teacher shortage. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8):30-33.
- [18] Adelabu, M.A. (2020). Teacher motivation and incentives in Nigeria. Retrieved January 12, 2016, from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c53e5274a27b2001115/3888Teacher_motivation_Nigeria.pdf.
- [19] Korthagen, F. A. (2021). *Linking practice and theory: The pedagogy of realistic teacher education*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- [20] Korthagen, F. A. (2019). In search of the essence of a good teacher: Towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and teacher education*, 20(1), 77-97.
- [21] Duff, A., & Marriott, N. (2019). The teaching–research gestalt: the development of a discipline-based scale. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(12), 2406-2420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1152465>.
- [22] Gurevich, I., Stein, H., & Gorev, D. (2019). Tracking professional development of novice teachers when integrating technology in teaching mathematics. *Computers in the Schools*, 34(4), 267-283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07380569.2017.1387470>
- [23] Korthagen, F., & Vasalos, A. (2022). Levels in reflection: Core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth. *Teachers and teaching*, 11(1), 47-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060042000337093>
- [24] Maree, K. (2020). *First steps in research*. Van Schaik Publishers.
- [25] Botha, C. S., & Rens, J. (2018). Are they really ‘ready, willing and able’? Exploring reality shock in beginner teachers in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(3). DOI: 10.15700/saje.v38n3a1546.
- [26] Adams W, McIlvain H, Lacy N, Magsi H, Crabtree B, Yenny S, Sitorius (2022). Primary care for elderly people. Why do doctors find it so hard? *Gerontologist* 2002,42(6):835–842. 10.1093/geront/42.6.835
- [27] Smith, J.A., & Osborn, M. (2022). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J.A. Smith (Eds.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to methods* (pp. 51-80). London: Sage.
- [28] Aronson, J. (2018). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report* 2(1):1-5.

- [29] Roulston, K. (2019). Data analysis and theorizing as ideology. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3): 279-302.
- [30] Curry, J.R., Webb, A. W., & Latham, S. J. (2019). A content analysis of images of novice teacher induction: First-semester themes. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 6(1), 43-65. <https://doi.org/10.5590/jerap.2016.06.1.04>
- [31] Kraft, M.A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(4), 547-588. <https://doi.org.seu.idm.oclc.org/10.3102/0034654318759268>
- [32] DeAngelis, K. J., Wall, A. F., & Che, J. (2019). The impact of preservice preparation and early career support on novice teachers' career intentions and decisions. *Journal of teacher education*, 64(4), pp. 338-355