

# Transitioning To Unfamiliar Ground: Lived Experiences of Public Junior High School Teachers Handling Senior High School Subjects In the Division Of Davao City

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*Abstract* — This study aimed at describing the lived experiences of the junior high school teachers as they also teach in the senior high to answer the shortage of qualified teachers in the senior high school in Davao City. It employed a descriptive phenomenological inquiry. Purposive sampling was used to identify the 12 participants. The following are the themes that emerged: preparation matters; challenging setbacks; variety of techniques; enriched experiences; combat tactics; opportunities unearthed; and attitude to senior high school teaching. Results revealed a plethora of challenges among junior high school teachers' teaching in the senior high school. It was found out that most of them struggled with both content and pedagogy. They had very rich undergraduate preparation and quite a lengthy experience in teaching in the junior high. Although, there were trainings and seminars conducted to prepare them it was not enough to master both content and pedagogy and manage a class of senior high school students, adding the fact that there was no instructional material support available. Mastery of the content and pedagogy is essential in the implementation of any curricular reforms. Though the SHS curriculum is still in its pilot implementation, there is a need to conduct an extensive retooling of these teachers in both content and pedagogy to effectively carry out the curriculum as well as the need to review the qualifications of teachers to teach in the SHS is suggested.

*Keywords* — *Teachers, Junior High School, Lived Experiences, Challenges, Senior High School, Insights*

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## I. Introduction

Teaching senior high school subjects can be challenging for junior high school teachers, especially when it comes to adjusting to the new curriculum and teaching methods. Junior high school teachers may lack the depth of knowledge required for senior high school subjects, which could lead to them struggling to teach the material effectively. Moreover, senior high school students are more advanced and require more complex teaching methods that may not be familiar to junior high school teachers. In addition, senior high school students may have different behavior patterns compared to junior high school students, and it may be challenging for junior high school

teachers to manage the classroom effectively. Finally, the curriculum for senior high school subjects may be significantly different from what junior high school teachers are accustomed to, which could make it challenging to design lesson plans that are effective. Indeed, the transition from teaching junior high school to senior high school subjects can be challenging for teachers, and it requires a lot of effort and dedication to succeed.

Some of the problems encountered by junior high school teachers in the Philippines when teaching senior high school subjects include lack of subject mastery, lack of training, and difficulty in adjusting to the new curriculum. One study conducted by Rodriguez, Natividad and Venezuela (2020) found that junior high school teachers in the Philippines who teach senior high school subjects often encounter difficulties in mastering the subject matter, particularly in specialized subjects such as accounting, physics, and biology. The study also noted that some teachers lack the necessary training and preparation to teach senior high school subjects, which can lead to ineffective teaching and learning outcomes.

A study by Asis, Aquino and Daus (2021) highlighted that junior high school teachers who are teaching senior high school subjects are often assigned to multiple subjects, which can result in a heavy workload and may lead to burnout and stress. The challenges faced by junior high school teachers who are teaching senior high school subjects include content mastery, teaching approaches, student expectations, and professional development opportunities. When combined, these challenges result in higher levels of dissatisfaction, burnout, and demotivation among the pool of educators who are tirelessly going beyond the extra mile just to provide learners the quality of education that they need and deserve. Given this premise, this study will be conducted to investigate the lived experiences of junior high school teachers who are handling senior high school subjects in the hope of highlighting their coping mechanisms and the insights gained from their experiences.

According to Barutçu and Özgür (2019), junior high school teachers who are assigned to teach senior high school subjects face challenges related to the level of difficulty of the subject matter, the lack of preparation and training for teaching senior high school, and the lack of familiarity with the senior high school curriculum. Yaman and Kuzu (2019) found that junior high school teachers who teach senior high school subjects face challenges related to the differences in teaching methods and strategies between the two levels, as well as the lack of resources and materials suitable for teaching senior high school.

One benefit is that junior high school teachers who handle senior high school subjects gain more experience and professional development opportunities. According to a study by Wei and Chen (2019), teachers who teach senior high school subjects are more likely to participate in professional development activities and to gain teaching experience, which can enhance their teaching skills and increase their job satisfaction. According to a study by Martiniello and Lingard (2019), junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects reported increased

professional development opportunities, which allowed them to expand their knowledge base and develop new teaching strategies.

Moreover, teaching senior high school subjects can provide junior high school teachers with opportunities for career advancement. According to a study by Li and Liu (2019), teachers who teach senior high school subjects are more likely to be promoted to leadership positions within their schools, which can lead to higher salaries and more job stability. As junior high school teachers gain experience in teaching senior high school subjects, they may become more competitive for promotions or transfers to senior high schools. For example, a study by Hsu (2019) found that junior high school English teachers who taught senior high school English were more likely to be recommended for positions in senior high schools than their counterparts who did not have such experience.

Additionally, teaching senior high school subjects can help junior high school teachers to build relationships with students and colleagues across different levels of education. This can enhance their sense of community and belonging in the profession. For instance, a study by Li (2020) found that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school courses in a cooperative learning environment reported increased satisfaction with their teaching and stronger relationships with colleagues.

A study by Sari, Sukartini, and Ramdani, (2019) found that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects coped with the challenges of the new curriculum by seeking support from their colleagues, who were able to provide them with guidance and advice. Moreover, according to a study by Huang and Lin (2019), junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects found it helpful to engage in collaborative learning with their colleagues, which allowed them to share knowledge and resources and to support one another in the classroom. A study by Martinez, Eddins, and Omizo (2020) found that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects used social support networks to cope with the challenges of their role. These networks included colleagues, mentors, and professional organizations.

*Participating in Professional Development.* According to a study by Hidayatullah, Purnomo, and Rofiah (2020), junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects coped with the challenges of the new curriculum by participating in professional development activities, which helped to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge. In addition, a study by Bawden (2019) reported that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school mathematics found it helpful to attend professional development workshops and conferences, which provided them with new teaching strategies and resources. A study by Wen and Yang (2021) reported that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects used professional development opportunities to cope with the challenges of their role, such as attending workshops or conferences and engaging in collaborative learning with colleagues.

*Adopting a Positive Mindset.* A study by Hasanah, Darmayanti, and Puspitasari (2021) found that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects coped with the challenges of the new curriculum by adopting a positive mindset and focusing on the opportunities for growth and development that the new curriculum presented. In addition, a study by Xu and Wang (2020) reported that junior high school teachers who taught senior high school biology found it helpful to engage in self-reflection and to seek feedback from their colleagues and students, which allowed them to improve their teaching practices and to better meet the needs of their students. In some cases, junior high school teachers who teach senior high school subjects may use self-care strategies, such as exercise or meditation, to manage stress and maintain their physical and mental health. This was reported in a study by Qin, Zhang, and Xu (2019), which found that self-care practices helped junior high school teachers to cope with the demands of their role.

*Time Management.* According to a study by Li and Liu (2019), junior high school teachers who taught senior high school physics found it helpful to manage their time effectively, which allowed them to keep up with the demands of the curriculum and to plan and deliver effective lessons. According to a study by Kim, Kwon, and Lee (2019), junior high school teachers who taught senior high school subjects reported using time management strategies, such as prioritizing tasks and delegating responsibilities, to manage the increased workload and demands of their role.

This study is primarily anchored on Theory of Teacher Identity Development. According to this theory, teachers develop a sense of who they are as professionals and individuals through a process of reflection and interaction with others in their field (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2020). This process of identity development is ongoing and can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the teacher's educational background, teaching experiences, and professional development opportunities (Beijaard et al., 2020). Teachers who teach outside their areas of specialization may experience challenges in developing their professional identities due to the mismatch between their training and their current teaching assignments (Chapman, 2019). This can lead to feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, as well as difficulties in establishing credibility with students and colleagues (Chapman, 2019).

Given the paradigm stated above, this study is anchored on the Theory of Teacher Resilience. According to this theory, resilience is the ability to adapt to challenging situations, cope with adversity, and maintain a sense of well-being and purpose (Howard & Johnson, 2020). Resilience is seen as a dynamic process that is influenced by a range of individual, interpersonal, and contextual factors, including the teacher's personal resources, social support, and job demands (Howard & Johnson, 2020). Teachers who are teaching beyond their areas of specialization may face a variety of challenges, such as a lack of content knowledge, difficulties in creating effective lesson plans, and feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy (Mertler & Campbell, 2019). However, research suggests that teachers can use a variety of coping strategies to overcome these challenges and develop resilience in their teaching roles.

## **II. Methodology**

Descriptive phenomenology as a qualitative research method was employed in this study. Descriptive phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that aims to explore the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals by describing their subjective experiences in detail (Creswell & Poth, 2019). Descriptive phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to understand and describe the essence of human experiences, as they are perceived by the individuals who have lived them, through a rigorous process of data analysis and interpretation (Giorgi, 2020).

The participants of the study are ten (10) public junior high school teachers who are currently assigned in schools in the Division of Davao City for school year 2022-2023 and who are currently handling senior high school subjects on top of their junior high school subject loads. In the selection of the participants of my study, I selected three secondary national high schools in Davao City: Davao City National High Schools (three teachers); Sta. Ana National High School (three teacher); and Mabini National High School (four teachers). Teachers were coded as Teacher 1 to Teacher 10.

The instrument to be used in the study is an interview guide crafted by the researcher based on the context of the research objectives. To address the validity issues of this design specifically on the method, the contents of the instrument are presented to a group of experts for validation. The sampling that is used for the selection of the participants is under the suggestions of the expert panels.

This study made use of Braun and Clarke's (2019) thematic analysis, which aimed to identify, analyze, and report patterns that build up the themes in a dataset. The researcher applied the methodology that were employed in the study because the theme analysis does not need a rigorous approach to the knowledge. The researcher followed the six-phase framework for doing the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2019).

## **III. Results and Discussion**

Every journey before taking off should start with a preparation, but not with the junior high school teachers who are also teaching in the senior high school. They started teaching in the senior high school without equipping them of the necessary skills and knowledge on the new courses in the senior high school, although trainings were given, they only came when they have already started teaching. Luckily, they were able to take personal measures so they become personally ready with their new teaching assignments. As they continue their journey, a lot of challenging setbacks surfaced like the mastery of the new concepts, insufficiency and unavailability of instructional materials, students' attitude to learning, and large class size.

After the extraction of the significant statements from the interview transcripts and the analysis of the formulated meanings, emerged the 4 themes in the first research question, The four themes are the following: (1) Preparation Matters; (2) Challenging Setbacks; (3) Divergent Techniques; (4) Enriched Experiences.

Moreover, with these teachers' high regard to their school heads and a genuine love to the profession, they acceded themselves to these realities and instead of lingering to these, they devised tactics to combat these challenges so to remain true to the oath they have taken as teachers.

This support comes in 2 forms: *instructional and moral support*. Because they felt the support of the people around them, the junior high school teachers who are also teaching in the senior high have developed progressive view towards the implementation of the senior high school curriculum.

The following are the insights of teachers in this study:

*Insight 1. Attitude on Senior High School.* Attitude as defined by Gikani & Leong (2019) is a “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols.” Teachers' attitudes play a prominent role in educational interaction (Gikani & Leong, 2019). As key implementers of the curriculum, teachers' attitudes toward the senior high school teaching greatly affects the success of the implementation.

*Insight 2. Progressive.* According to Fullan (2022), change is always accompanied by messiness. Messiness means that there are negativities in the implementation of the curriculum.

*Insight 3. Conditional Approbation.* Conditional approbation means that someone is in between positive and negative. The conditions are placed in between. One cannot be fully positive nor be fully negative because of some reasons. In this study, there are teacher informants who are torn between having a positive attitude and negative attitude on senior high school teaching because of the challenges that they have encountered.

### *Analysis*

With the additional two years of high school, many have expressed their views and opinions regarding the changes of the curriculum, but this is just part of the messiness that change has brought about.

Teachers has the prime share of responsibility in the curricular reforms for the implementation and improvement of the curriculum are placed in them (Beattie, 2019). Since the teachers have the voluminous responsibility in the implementation of the curriculum, it is just but appropriate to know on how they perceive the curriculum they are implementing.

How the teachers implement the curriculum is primarily influenced on how they view the policy. They may either act in consonance to the policy or discordance to the policy (Bekalo & Welford, 2020).

Although considered as a shallow assessment of the effectiveness of the program, Magno and Piosang (2019), this provides a snippet on how competent the staff, precision of the implementation process, and the readiness of the students to deliver what is in the curriculum (Cutamora, et. al. (2018).

Fkun, et.al. (2021) found out that because the teachers positively perceive the Active, Joyful, and Effective Learning Approach in teaching to senior high school students, the implementation is successful.

However, in the study of Ahmad (2019), he found out that the constraints of successfully implementing the 2013 curriculum were teachers` fixed mindset within the implementation. In the case of the implementation of K12 instruction, it was indicated that teachers encountered dilemmas in the implementation of the K12 because they lack understanding about the new curriculum (Machmud, 2021).

Moreover, the understanding of the teachers in the 2013 curriculum is relatively close to basic principles of the curriculum and most of them claim that the new curriculum cannot be easily implemented (Darsih, 2019).

The related studies and literature give us a preview of what is really happening in the implementation of the curricular initiatives in the educational arena. These tell us that there is really a gap in the implementation of the curricular reforms; nevertheless, these challenges should never hamper change to take place. In the words of Fullan (2022), the paradox in the culture of change is that transformation would not be possible without accompanying messiness.

Additionally, all successful schools experience “implementation dips” as they move forward. Change is messy in the early years, but as it goes a long way, it becomes organized. However, if the gaps in the implementation will not be addressed, the teachers, as key implementers, will linger to the ways on how they implement the curriculum, which can be very detrimental to its implementation, thereby trouncing and defeating the ultimate purpose of the curriculum reform.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Generally, DepEd has pure and good intentions in implementing the senior high school curriculum because it will make the graduates of the Philippine education system compete with the rest of the world, but in its first 2 years of the implementation, it is still faced with challenges like shortage of qualified teachers, not enough preparation of the junior high school teachers, who

were selected to teach in the senior high, to be adequately equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge because the trainings were conducted when they have already started the academic year, content mastery of the new concepts, insufficiency and unavailability of instructional materials, students` attitude to learning, and large class. Consequently, these have made other teachers to be half- hearted with the implementation of the senior high curriculum.

It is more important than ever that we provide all students with the knowledge and skills they'll need to succeed in an ever-more competitive global environment. We continue to take important steps to help ensure that students are prepared for success after high school.

We recently updated our language arts and mathematics learning standards — that is, what we expect students to know and do in the various subject areas at each grade level. The process was deliberate, transparent and collaborative; expert educators were involved every step of the way. The result will be improved teaching and learning in the classrooms, with a greater emphasis on supporting learners, students with disabilities and other special populations.

At the same time, using the nationally-developed Next Generation Science Standards as a starting point, we utilized the expertise of science education stakeholders to draft a rigorous new set of science learning standards. Our vision for the future of science education is now contained in the Science Learning Standards. These new standards provide endless possibilities for teachers to engage students in science learning experiences that explore, advance and deepen their understanding of natural phenomena.

The process of establishing learning standards cannot be a static one; we must continually review and renew the standards to ensure our children can keep pace with a world that is evolving rapidly and continuously.

Studies show that the quality of a child's teacher is the single most important school-based factor in that student's educational success. So, we have put a great deal of effort into the way we train and support teachers. This includes updating the curriculum used in schools of education, so that teachers are prepared to deliver the new, more rigorous learning standards.

Teachers must be prepared to give our youngest learners a solid base of knowledge in the STEM areas. And we must support and encourage them to engage in "hands-on" teaching, both inside and outside of the classroom. Those kinds of hands-on experiences are often the most meaningful for children, and instill in them an early love for scientific exploration and discovery.

It is sometimes hard to imagine just how quickly and radically technology has changed our lives. Smart phones have been commercially available for only 10 years, but we already take for granted the awesome computing power we now all carry in our pockets. So, our students need an education that will prepare them to use (and maybe even help develop) the new technologies that will solve the world's ever-more complex problems.



Success in the future will also require us to do a much better job of ensuring equity, diversity and integration throughout our educational systems. Research shows that socioeconomic and racial integration leads to better academic outcomes for all students, while at the same time reducing the achievement gap among students of different backgrounds. As well, we must continue to work to ensure that schools are safe havens where students are free and empowered to learn without fear of discrimination, harassment or intimidation because of their race, ethnicity, religion, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other basis. Every school must provide a learning environment where all students feel safe and welcome, and where parents and families are encouraged to take an active role in their children's education.

I believe strongly that education holds the key to our future success. I am encouraged and optimistic that we are taking the right steps to provide the kinds of educational opportunities that will lift-up our society for generations to come.

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