

The Experiences of Elementary School Teachers in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

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Abstract— This study explored the experiences of elementary classroom teachers in implementing the scripted curriculum mandated by the Department of Education. It aimed to understand the challenges they encounter, the coping mechanisms they apply, and the insights they have gained from their experiences. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of 10 selected elementary teachers. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis was used to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to their experiences with the scripted curriculum. The findings revealed both positive and challenging experiences among teachers. Positive experiences included improved lesson structure and support for novice teachers, while challenges involved limited flexibility, time management difficulties, mismatch with local context, and reduced autonomy. Teachers coped by using flexible classroom strategies, practicing time management, contextualizing lessons, and maintaining creativity within limits. Insights generated highlighted the importance of flexibility, balancing structure with professional judgment, adapting to local context, and nurturing creativity. The study suggests the need for curriculum adjustments to allow flexibility, ongoing teacher training, and supportive school leadership to help teachers navigate scripted programs effectively. Future research should explore the perspectives of students and the long-term impact of curriculum reforms.

I. Introduction

Scripted curricula aim to ensure uniformity and consistency in delivery of education; however, they often challenge teachers' autonomy and ability to adapt lessons to their students' diverse needs. By exploring the experiences of teachers implementing this curriculum in Sta. Cruz North District, Division of Davao del Sur, the study delves into how this rigid structure affects their teaching practices and professional responsibilities, as well as the strategies they employ to address these constraints.

In global context, the use of scripted curricula has sparked debates among educators and policymakers. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act led to the widespread adoption of scripted programs aimed at improving test scores and closing achievement gaps. However, research indicates that such curricula can be overly rigid, stifling teacher creativity and reducing job satisfaction. McNeil (2000) argues that scripted programs can undermine the professional expertise of teachers, limiting their ability to adapt instruction to the unique needs of their students. Similarly, a study by Milner (2013) found that while scripted curricula might increase standardized test scores, they often lead to teacher burnout and disengagement.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) provides a centralized and standardized curriculum across public schools. This approach aims to ensure uniformity and alignment with national education standards but presents significant challenges for classroom teachers. A study by Bolalin and Boado (2020) found that many Filipino educators find the scripted nature of these curricula restrictive, limiting their ability to adapt lessons to local contexts and diverse student backgrounds. The emphasis on compliance with provided scripts often leaves little room for creativity and flexibility, which are crucial in addressing the varying needs of students in a country with significant socio-economic and cultural diversity (Garcia & Parba, 2018).

In the local setting of Sta. Cruz North, Davao del Sur, teachers encounter significant challenges with the Department of Education's scripted curriculum, particularly in managing overcrowded classrooms filled with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Educators often express frustration with the rigid structure of the curriculum, which limits their ability to tailor lessons to the unique needs of their students. According to Macarandan (2019), the rigidity of the scripted approach does not account for the diverse learning needs in this region, where flexibility and adaptation are vital for effective teaching. Consequently, teachers in Sta. Cruz North, Davao del Sur are often forced to navigate a complex landscape of adhering to national mandates while simultaneously trying to provide a meaningful learning experience for their students.

These challenges are compounded by unique socio-cultural and educational contexts that demand flexibility and creativity from teachers. Understanding the voices of classroom teachers, particularly their experiences and struggles with scripted curricula, is essential for informing policy decisions that better support effective teaching and learning practices in diverse educational environments.

II. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology used to explore the curriculum implementation in educational settings. The chosen qualitative approach aims to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of teachers, allowing for understanding curriculum adaptation and delivery.

Research Design

The research design for this study is a qualitative research approach using phenomenology, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences of individuals as they engage with a particular phenomenon, in this case, curriculum implementation. Phenomenology is particularly suited for this study because it seeks to capture the essence of participants' experiences and how they perceive and interpret the process of implementing a curriculum within their specific educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By employing phenomenology, the researcher aims to explore the meanings that teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders assign to their

experiences with curriculum implementation, providing deep insights into their beliefs, attitudes, and challenges.

Research Participants and Sampling Procedure

The research participants for this study were elementary teachers involved in curriculum implementation at North Sta. Cruz District. Specifically, the study focused on 10 participants, including teachers and curriculum coordinators, to gain diverse perspectives on the lived experiences of implementing the curriculum. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants who have direct experience with curriculum implementation and can provide in-depth insights (Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling is ideal for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to select information-rich cases that provide valuable perspectives on the phenomenon under study. The inclusion criteria for participants will be: (1) currently teaching at schools of Sta. Cruz North District, (2) having at least one year of experience with the current curriculum, and (3) willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and share their experiences and perspectives.

Research Instrument

The procedure for conducting In-Depth Interviews in this study involved using an Interview Guide, a set of semi-structured questions designed to cover key themes related to the research topic while allowing flexibility to explore emergent themes (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection

The researcher gathered data through In-Depth Interviews (IDI), a qualitative data collection method designed to explore participants' detailed perspectives, experiences, and insights regarding curriculum implementation. An In-Depth Interview is a face-to-face conversation that allows for a deep exploration of the participants' thoughts and feelings on a specific topic, providing rich, comprehensive data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This approach is particularly suitable for understanding complex phenomena, such as the challenges and dynamics of curriculum implementation, as it allows participants to elaborate on their experiences and provides the flexibility to probe further into interesting or unexpected responses.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis to uncover patterns, themes, and insights related to curriculum implementation. The first step involved data preparation, where all audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The second step is the coding process, where the researcher systematically identified and label segments of data that are relevant to the research questions. In the third step, the researcher reviewed and refine these categories to develop themes that capture the core meanings underlying the data. The fourth step involves defining and naming the final themes. The researcher articulated the essence of each theme and what it reveals about the data,

providing clear definitions and descriptions to ensure they are meaningful and contribute to answering the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017). Finally, the researcher wrote up the findings, providing a narrative that integrates the themes with direct quotes from participants to illustrate the key points and add depth to the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

III. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study on the experiences of elementary classroom teachers in implementing the scripted curriculum mandated by the Department of Education. It discusses both the positive and challenging experiences shared by the teachers, along with the coping mechanisms they use to manage these challenges. The chapter also provides insights drawn from their stories, highlighting how the scripted curriculum impacts their teaching practices, professional autonomy, and ability to meet the diverse needs of their students.

1. What are the experiences of elementary school teachers in implementing a scripted curriculum?

On the Experiences of Elementary School Teachers in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

The study revealed a mix of positive and challenging experiences among elementary classroom teachers implementing the scripted curriculum mandated by the Department of Education. Teachers appreciated the improved lesson structure and consistency that the scripted curriculum provided, as it helped ensure that all required content was covered and reduced the amount of time needed for lesson preparation. This consistency also supported curriculum alignment across grade levels and classrooms, which teachers saw as helpful in maintaining uniform learning standards.

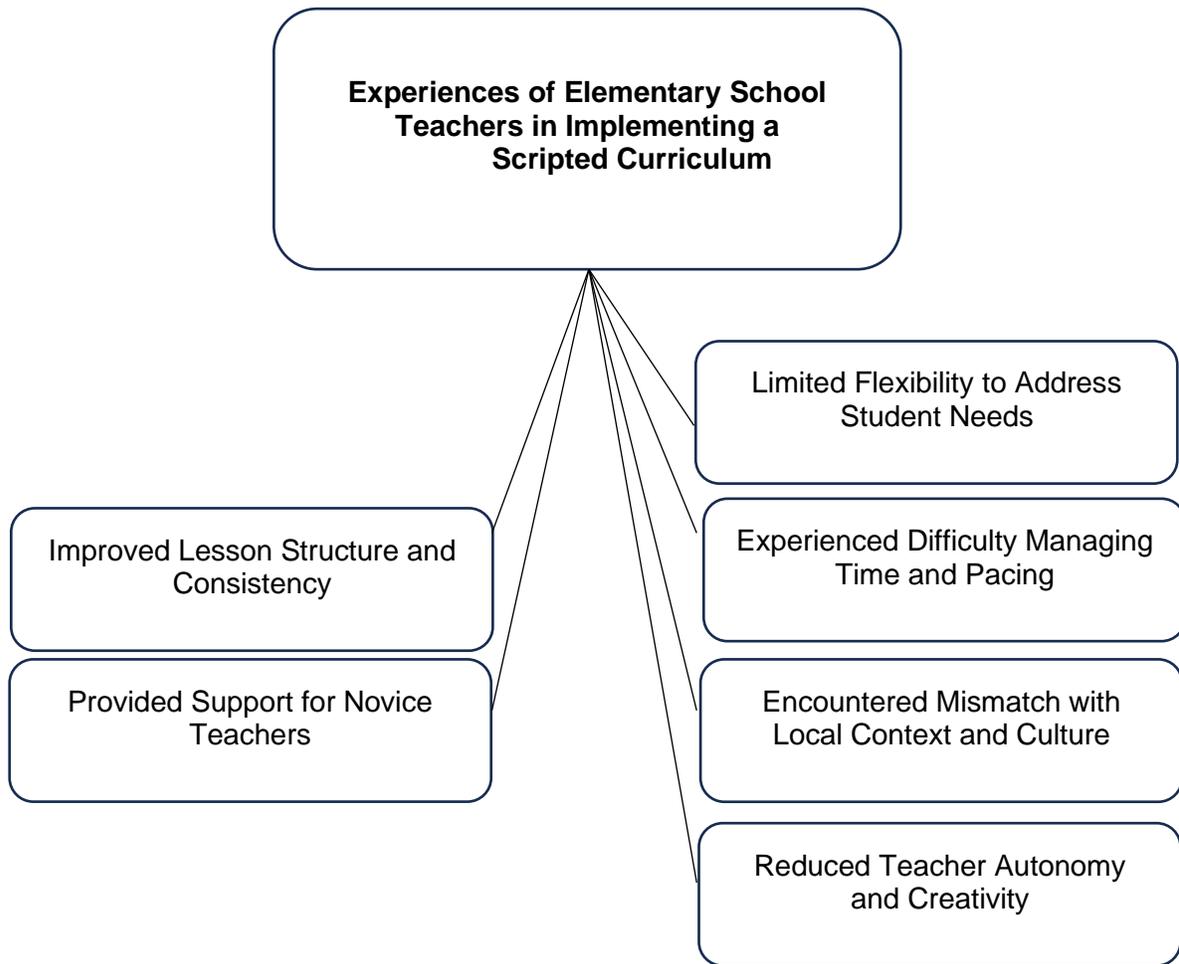


Figure 1. Experiences of Elementary School Teachers in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

Improved Lesson Structure and Consistency

One of the positive experiences shared by the teachers is that the scripted curriculum provides improved lesson structure and consistency. Teachers appreciate that the curriculum offers a clear guide for what to teach, making lesson preparation easier and ensuring that all required topics are covered. This consistency helps teachers follow a clear sequence, which they feel is especially helpful in managing time and maintaining classroom order.

Provided Support for Novice Teachers

Another positive theme that emerged from the interviews is the value of the scripted curriculum in supporting novice teachers. Many beginning teachers shared that the detailed lessons gave them confidence and a sense of direction in managing their classes. The script served as a

practical guide, helping them navigate the challenges of lesson delivery, classroom management, and pacing, especially during their adjustment period.

Limited Flexibility to Address Student Needs

One of the major challenges shared by the teachers was the limited flexibility of the scripted curriculum in addressing the diverse needs of their students. Teachers felt constrained by the rigid lesson plans, making it difficult to adjust instruction for students with different learning styles, abilities, or interests. They expressed the need for more space to modify lessons so they could better engage and support their learners.

Difficulty Managing Time and Pacing

Another common challenge teachers shared was the difficulty of managing time and pacing when using the scripted curriculum. Many teachers found it hard to cover all parts of the lesson within the allocated time, especially when students needed extra explanations or activities. This struggle often left them feeling rushed, sometimes sacrificing student understanding just to keep up with the required lesson flow.

Encountered Mismatch with Local Context and Culture

A notable challenge identified by the teachers was the mismatch between the scripted curriculum and the local context and culture of their students. Many teachers observed that some examples, topics, and materials in the curriculum were not relatable or meaningful to learners, especially those coming from rural or culturally diverse backgrounds. This disconnect often made it harder to engage students and help them connect with the lessons.

Reduced Teacher Autonomy and Creativity

One of the most frustrating challenges shared by teachers was the feeling of reduced autonomy and limited creativity when using the scripted curriculum. Many teachers felt that strictly following the script restricted their ability to adjust teaching strategies, use innovative activities, or apply their own ideas, making their teaching feel mechanical and less engaging.

2. *What are the coping mechanisms do elementary school teachers employ to address the challenges in implementing a scripted curriculum?*

Coping Mechanisms of Elementary School Teachers to Address the Challenges in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

The study found that elementary classroom teachers use several coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges of implementing the scripted curriculum mandated by the Department of Education.

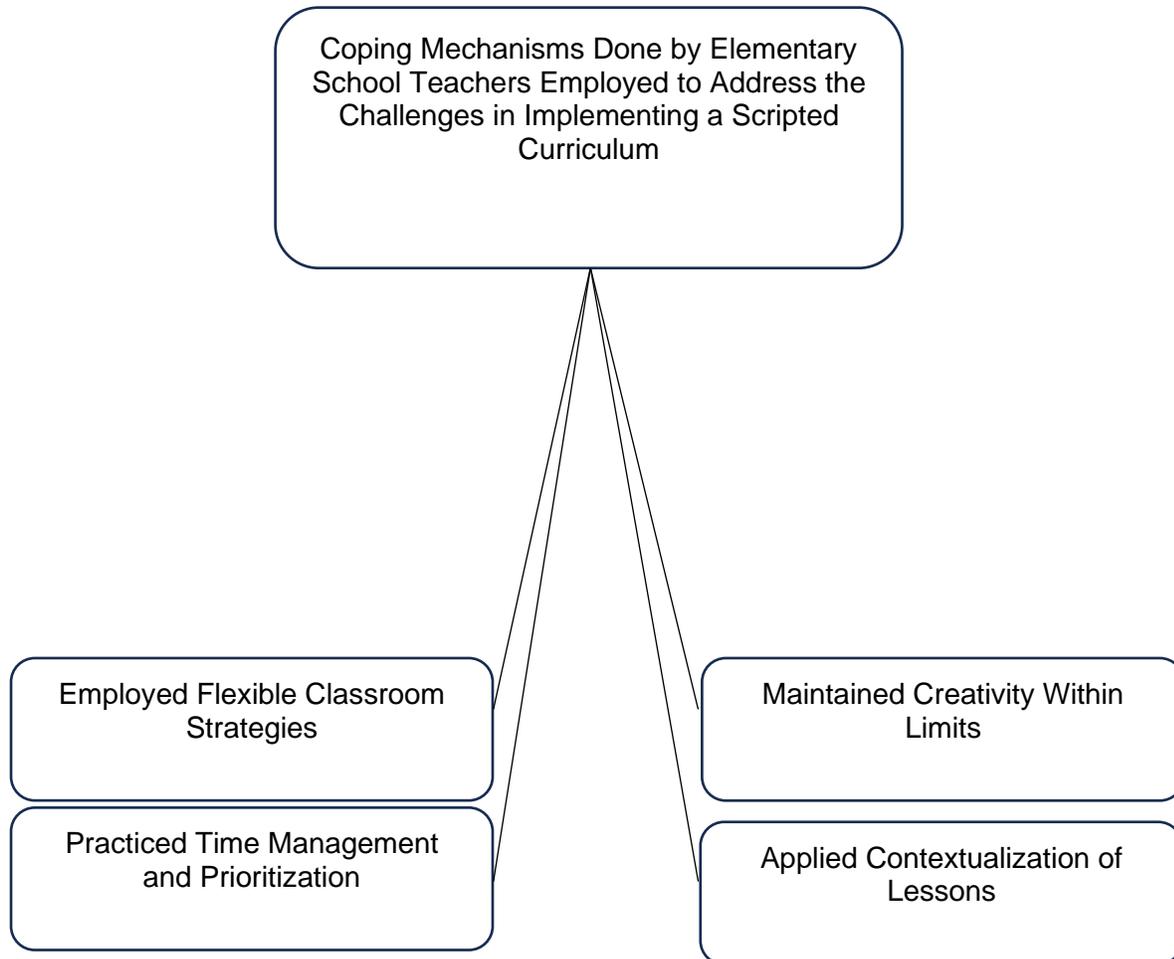


Figure 2. Coping Mechanisms Done by Elementary School Teachers Employed to Address the Challenges in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum
Used Flexible Classroom Strategies

One of the main coping mechanisms teachers used was applying flexible classroom strategies to adjust lessons despite the rigid scripted curriculum. Teachers found ways to simplify activities, modify instructions, and add supplemental tasks to better support students' diverse needs without fully deviating from the script. This flexibility allowed them to make the lessons more understandable and engaging for learners.

Practiced Time Management and Prioritization

To cope with the challenge of time constraints, teachers practiced time management and prioritization when delivering scripted lessons. They focused on the most essential parts of the lesson, adjusted the pacing, and sometimes skipped less critical sections to make sure key learning objectives were met within the limited class time.

Applied Contextualization of Lessons

To make scripted lessons more relatable and meaningful, teachers coped by applying contextualization strategies. They adapted examples, translated terms into the local dialect, and connected lesson content to the students’ cultural and community background, helping learners better understand and engage with the material.

Maintained Creativity Within Limits

Despite the rigid nature of the scripted curriculum, teachers found ways to maintain creativity within limits. They added small interactive activities, used humor, or applied their own teaching style to make lessons more engaging while still following the required lesson flow and objectives.

3. *What insights can be generated from the experiences of elementary school teachers in implementing a scripted curriculum?*

The Insights Generated from Elementary School Teachers in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

From their experiences implementing the scripted curriculum, elementary teachers have gained valuable insights that shape how they view their teaching practice.

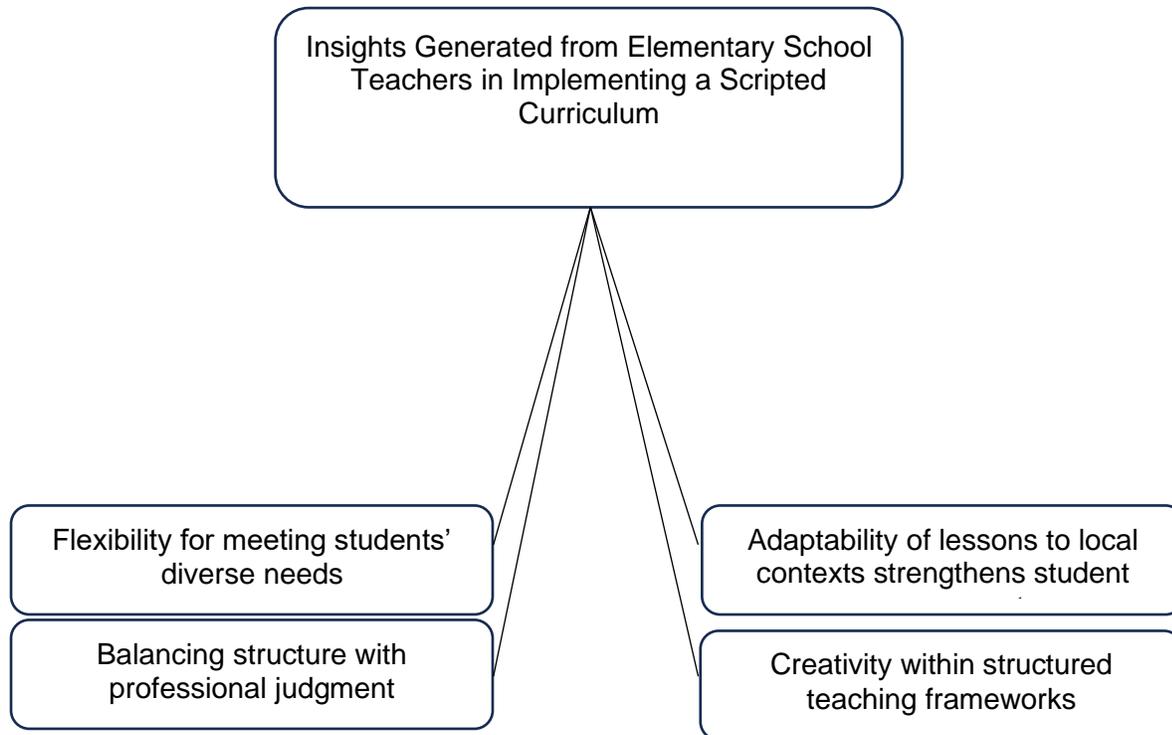


Figure 3. Insights Generated from Elementary School Teachers in Implementing a Scripted Curriculum

Flexibility for meeting students' diverse needs

Teachers shared the important insight that flexibility plays a crucial role in meeting the diverse needs of their students. They realized that while the scripted curriculum offers structure, it cannot fully address the varied learning abilities, interests, and backgrounds present in their classrooms. For meaningful learning to happen, teachers need room to adjust their approaches and respond to what their students truly need.

Balancing structure with professional judgment

Teachers shared the insight that while they appreciate the structure provided by the scripted curriculum, they also value the ability to exercise their professional judgment. They recognized that a good balance between following the script and applying their own expertise is necessary to effectively meet students' needs and ensure meaningful learning in the classroom.

Adaptability of lessons to local context strengthens student engagement

Teachers gained the insight that adapting scripted lessons to fit their students' local context and experiences greatly improves student engagement. They observed that when examples, activities, and topics are made relatable to students' everyday lives and culture, learners are more interested, responsive, and motivated to participate in class.

Creativity within structured teaching frameworks

Teachers realized that even within the limits of a scripted curriculum, creativity can still flourish in the classroom. They found that adding small creative touches—like fun activities, humor, or interactive methods—keeps lessons engaging and helps maintain student interest, all while meeting the required lesson objectives.

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