

Experiences of Junior High School Teachers in the Implementation of the National Learning Camp

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Abstract—This study aimed to provide a deep and thorough understanding of the experiences of Junior High School teachers during the implementation of the National Learning Camp in the Department of Education Division of Agusan del Sur. Specifically, it sought to explore teachers' experiences during their involvement in implementing the National Learning Camp. This study employed Van Manen's hermeneutic-phenomenological qualitative design. The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide and motive questions for the focus group discussion to collect data to analyzing the data was also used, based on the teachers' narratives during the National Learning Camp implementation. The findings showed six emerging themes: teachers demonstrated a strong sense of volunteerism, teachers displayed steadfast commitment, fostered dynamic learning strategies for the students, developed manipulative and holistic skills among students, program's effectiveness is evident, and challenges and coping strategies of teachers during their involvement in the implementation of the National Learning Camp. Moreover, the sixth theme yielded significant sub-themes on the challenges faced, including resource limitations, diverse student learning needs, and a lack of parental support. On the other hand, discovered coping strategies employed include resource sharing, differentiated instruction, and parent orientation.

Keywords— Experiences, Junior High School, National Learning Camp.

I. INTRODUCTION

In response to the profound shifts in the educational landscape brought about by the advent of the digital age and pandemic, the teaching-learning process faced unprecedented challenges. Students faced an abrupt transition to remote learning and disruptions in their regular academic routines, resulting in a significant learning gap. Research has also consistently demonstrated that students also experience learning losses when they are not engaged in educational activities during the school-year break. Recognizing the imperative to bridge these educational gaps, the Department of Education introduced DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2023, titled "Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the National Learning Camp."

This initiative aligns with the MATATAG: Bansa Makabata, Batang Makabansa agenda and contributes to the Department of Education's commitment to the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP), aimed at addressing learning gaps stemming from the pandemic and supporting K-12 learners in public elementary and secondary schools nationwide in attaining learning standards. The decision to implement the NLC is substantiated by the outcomes of the National Achievement Test (NAT) and International Large

Scale Assessments (ILSAs), which underscore the need for additional educational support to enhance learners' academic performance.

The National Learning Camp endeavors to elevate student outcomes and bolster teacher competency, ultimately improving the quality of education. This initiative places a premium on student well-being, engagement, inclusive education, and the creation of an enriching learning environment conducive to both teachers' and students' success. Learning camps and traditional school classrooms intersect as institutions that mutually enrich the educational experiences of young people. This occupies a vital position along the education spectrum, facilitating the development of sportsmanship, positive peer relations, social skills, and a sense of belonging among campers.

These activities nurture the mindsets that play a pivotal role in mitigating learning loss and boosting academic achievement when campers return to school (Ozier, 2018). The program provides focused interventions, individualized assistance, and different learning experiences in an effort to close the learning gaps caused by the pandemic. It is designed to enhance reading and numeracy skills, hasten the accomplishment of the education goals, and fortify the department's learning recovery and continuity program. Njue (2020) contented that national Learning Camps provide targeted interventions to assist students in making up lost learning and bridging educational gaps. National Learning Camps aim to advance educational equity by offering extra assistance to learners who may be more vulnerable to academic disparities. These camps help level the playing field by providing equal chances to everyone, regardless of socioeconomic background or location.

Previous study's findings indicate that participation in the National Learning Camp yields a diverse range of positive outcomes. Students who enrolled in the National Learning Camp program experience substantial improvements in terms of academic success, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving approaches. Beyond the confines of the classroom, the National Learning Camp fosters social and emotional growth, bolstering students' self-assurance, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Qualitative surveys underscore the program's advantages, emphasizing its emphasis on group cooperation, contextualized learning opportunities, and exposure to real-world situations.

A study shows that the previously implemented recovery program was effective in increasing the interest of learners to

learn, creating a positive impact on their character development, and slightly improving their problem-solving and communication skills (Morales, et. al, 2024). Another study showed that a certain learning camp creates a different atmosphere compared to the ordinary classroom setting, and it showed remarkable outcomes aligned with their goal (Martin, et. al., 2016). Thus, realizing that the learning camps apply a unique approach to achieving goals.

According to a study by Ozier, L. (2018), after seeing a difference that the teachers observed in their learning camp with a different learning area, they became interested and inspired to improve their teaching practices to achieve a successful learning journey with the students. The National Learning Camp emphasizes bridging learning gaps and improving teaching effectiveness, however, teachers' actual experiences with the program are vital. While previous research recognized the difficulties teachers encounter in participating in the NLC, a more thorough exploration of the difficulties that affect their capacity to incorporate new pedagogical strategies (David et al., 2024).

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The current study generally centers on the learning experiences of teachers implementing the National Learning Camp. It would explore their various challenges and coping strategies employed to address the challenges advocated by the learning camp. It is the purpose of this study to discover teachers' particular experiences in dealing with their teaching efficacy, including their approaches in their classrooms and the increased Teacher Support. It is expected that teachers may be supported by providing training and resources provided by educational authorities, which will help them implement effective teaching strategies and assessment methods during the camp.

II. FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which explains how social interactions influence an individual's cognitive growth. He was convinced that learning occurred through interactions with others in the communities: peers, adults, teachers, and other mentors. Vygotsky sought to understand how people learn in social environments and developed a unique theory of social learning. He concluded that educators may regulate a variety of elements in a classroom environment, such as activities, actions, and reactions. As a result, he encouraged more interactive activities to promote cognitive growth, such as productive discussions, constructive feedback, and collaboration with others.

He further stressed that human development relies on social interaction and, therefore, can differ among cultures. It suggests that human learning is largely a social process, and that cognitive functions are formed based on the interactions

with those around who are more skilled. Accordingly, psychological growth is guided, in part, by people in people's lives who are in mentor-type roles, such as teachers and students. Other times, people develop their values and beliefs through their interactions within social groups or by participating in cultural events.

This theory of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), is highly relevant to the collaborative and interactive learning environment of the National Learning Camp, which can help students' cognitive and social growth. The researcher postulates that the camp's activities and mentorship opportunities will provide students with the support they need to succeed at levels beyond their independent ability, resulting in greater learning gains. Further, the teacher's initiative to influence and enrich individual learning during the learning camp would provide them with learning experiences that affect how learning takes place.

In addition, David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, on which the study is grounded, also served as one of the foundations in this research. David Kolb's experiential learning theory is concerned with learning through experience and a learning process in which information is acquired by combining perception and interpretation of an event (Devi et al., 2023). It describes how learning happens as a result of firsthand experience, introspection, and exploration. It is a comprehensive educational concept based on the idea that a person's upbringing, schooling, and employment significantly affect how well they learn and comprehend new information.

Furthermore, its emphasis on active involvement, introspective thinking, and practical application is considered effective in facilitating learning and personal growth. The approach promotes active participation in real-world situations, which can be more interesting and memorable than passive learning techniques. Deeper learning and information retention are promoted by active participation in tasks and activities. Additionally, it enables people to relate new knowledge or abilities to their past experiences and knowledge base. The chance of using what has been taught and motivation are both increased by this personal significance. A pleasant learning experience and greater motivation might result from having the chance to actively engage and reflect on one's experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is relevant to all teachers during the implementation of the National learning Camp. It describes the ideal process of learning, inviting them to understand and empower themselves to take charge of their own teaching styles for their students' learning and development. The way teachers teach, and learners learn, is the way they approach life in general. It is also the way they solve problems, make decisions, work on teams, and meet life's challenges.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory can be effectively used by Junior High School teachers in implementing the National Learning Camp. Teachers involve students in new experiences or activities. They reflect on these experiences and consider what happened. They can then develop concepts and generalizations from their reflections and apply the new ideas in practice to see how they work in real-world situations.

Providing a variety of teaching strategies through hands-on activities, reflective practices, and real-world applications offers teachers diverse learning experiences to practice in the National Learning Camp.

Thus, this study is qualitative. It does not involve hypotheses. It assumes that teachers' learning experiences at the National Learning Camp are not objective but are shaped by their individual perspectives, the specific context of events, and their cultural background. All of these influenced their interpretations of their complex experiences during the program's implementation.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to explore the experiences of Junior High School teachers during the implementation of the National Learning Camp in the Agusan del Sur Division. Specifically, it sought to answer the question: What are the experiences of Junior High School teachers during their involvement in the implementation of the National Learning Camp?

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, following Max van Manen's approach. This method focuses on understanding the hidden essence of "lived experiences" through detailed narratives selected Junior High School teachers from small, medium, and large schools in the Agusan del Sur Division who served as volunteers. Data collection involved an interview guide and motive questions for focus group discussions. The researcher analyzed the data by reflecting on these narratives to identify emerging themes related to the teachers' involvement in the National Learning Camp.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study explored the lived experiences of Junior High School teachers during the implementation of the National Learning Camp in the Agusan del Sur Division. Through the analysis of the gathered data, six major themes emerged, reflecting the teachers' experiences, practices, challenges, and insights while implementing the program.

Theme 1: Demonstrating a Strong Sense of Volunteerism

The findings revealed that teachers showed a strong sense of volunteerism during the implementation of the National Learning Camp. Despite the summer break, teachers willingly devoted their time, effort, and even personal resources to support students in addressing learning gaps and improving academically. Their willingness to serve went beyond their regular teaching responsibilities, driven by their genuine concern for learners, especially those who were struggling. Teachers also showed initiative by seeking and soliciting instructional materials from stakeholders whenever resources were limited. Many participants expressed their willingness to continue volunteering in future NLC implementations because they witnessed positive changes in students' learning, participation, and overall development. These experiences

highlight the teachers' passion for service, commitment to education, and dedication to helping learners succeed.

The findings support the idea of Fraser-Smith (2016), who emphasized that long-term engagement often comes from a strong sense of purpose and fulfillment, especially when teachers feel they are making a meaningful difference in students' lives. Teachers' intrinsic motivation and dedication contributed significantly to the successful implementation of the program.

Theme 2: Displaying Steadfast Commitment

The study found that teachers demonstrated unwavering commitment in fulfilling their responsibilities during the National Learning Camp. Even in the face of challenges such as limited parental support, diverse student needs, and difficult teaching conditions in remote areas, teachers remained determined to help students learn and grow. They prepared engaging lesson plans, developed instructional materials, conducted home visits, and provided individualized support to learners who needed extra attention. Teachers also displayed patience, resilience, and resourcefulness in ensuring that every student received proper guidance and encouragement. Their participation in the NLC was seen not only as a professional duty but also as a meaningful opportunity to contribute to the academic and personal growth of their students. This strong commitment helped create a positive and supportive learning environment that contributed to the success of the program.

The findings are consistent with David et al. (2024), who explained that committed teachers foster supportive and engaging learning environments that promote academic achievement and socio-emotional development. Similarly, Hvidman (2020) emphasized that committed teachers serve as mentors and role models who nurture students' self-confidence and emotional growth. Davies et al. (2023) further noted that teacher commitment helps reduce burnout and contributes to a positive and productive educational environment.

Theme 3: Fostering Dynamic Learning Strategies for Students

The findings showed that teachers utilized dynamic and learner-centered teaching strategies to make learning more engaging, meaningful, and enjoyable for students during the National Learning Camp. Teachers incorporated collaborative learning, peer teaching, experiential learning, group activities, games, visual aids, videos, and hands-on activities to encourage active participation and sustain students' interest in learning. They also adjusted their lessons according to students' academic levels, learning styles, and abilities through differentiated instruction and flexible grouping. These strategies enabled teachers to simplify lessons, make concepts easier to understand, and effectively address the diverse needs of learners. The findings suggest that the use of varied and interactive instructional approaches enhanced students' engagement, improved their understanding, and created more meaningful learning experiences during the camp.

These findings support the claim of Martin et al. (2016), who stated that learning becomes more meaningful when students actively construct knowledge through experiences and interaction. Likewise, Devi (2023) emphasized that

engaging, interactive, and hands-on activities help maintain students' interest and increase participation in learning programs.

Theme 4: Developing Manipulative and Holistic Skills among Students

The study revealed that the National Learning Camp contributed significantly to the development of students' manipulative and holistic skills. Teachers emphasized activities that nurtured not only academic learning but also students' emotional, social, and physical development. Learners showed enthusiasm and eagerness during hands-on and manipulative activities, which increased their confidence, motivation, and participation in class. Teachers carefully adjusted activities according to students' capabilities and learning levels to ensure that all learners felt supported, valued, and included. The findings indicate that the NLC created a positive and inclusive learning environment where students were able to develop practical skills, teamwork, confidence, and cooperation while improving their academic performance. This holistic approach to learning contributed greatly to students' overall well-being and personal growth.

The findings align with Aswad (2017), who asserted that a positive teaching and learning environment motivates students' participation and engagement. Martin et al. (2016) also noted that the National Learning Camp effectively improves literacy and numeracy skills through engaging and supportive learning experiences. Furthermore, Morales and Oluwa (2024) highlighted that teachers' intrinsic motivation positively influences students' learning journeys and overall development.

Theme 5: Manifesting the Program's Effectiveness

The findings affirmed that the National Learning Camp was effective in improving both students' learning outcomes and teachers' professional competencies. Teachers observed noticeable improvements in students' literacy and numeracy skills, confidence, motivation, and classroom participation, particularly among those who regularly attended the program. Participants also shared that the NLC enhanced their teaching strategies, classroom management skills, and ability to handle challenging subjects such as Mathematics and Reading. In addition, collaborative teaching practices, seminars, workshops, and shared instructional resources strengthened teachers' competence and confidence in implementing the program. Overall, the findings suggest that the NLC served as an effective educational intervention that positively impacted students' academic performance while also supporting teachers' professional growth and development.

The findings support Maguate (2024), who emphasized that collaborative learning enhances students' innovative abilities, empathy, and mutual learning. David et al. (2024) also explained that collaborative teaching promotes positive learning outcomes and strengthens students' learning orientation. Furthermore, Wilson et al. (2018) found that collaborative professional learning communities empower teachers and create positive learning environments, while King et al. (2022) stressed that collaborative cultures among teachers contribute to high-quality teaching and learning.

Mahoney et al. (2021) further emphasized that proper training and instructional resources positively influence student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

Theme 6: Challenges and Coping Strategies Experienced by Teachers during the Implementation of the National Learning Camp

The study identified several challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation of the National Learning Camp, including limited instructional materials, inadequate facilities and equipment, diverse student learning needs, and lack of parental support. Teachers experienced difficulties in conducting lessons and activities because of insufficient resources and the varying abilities of learners, including students with special needs. Despite these challenges, teachers remained resilient and resourceful by adopting various coping strategies such as resource sharing, differentiated instruction, individualized learning plans, flexible grouping, and collaboration with co-teachers and stakeholders. Some teachers also improvised instructional materials, provided students with basic school supplies and snacks, and suggested conducting parent orientations and PTA meetings to strengthen parental involvement and support. The findings demonstrate that, despite the obstacles they encountered, teachers remained committed, collaborative, and determined to ensure the successful implementation of the program and continuously support the needs of their learners.

These findings are supported by Saputro et al. (2020), who explained that the lack of instructional materials negatively affects student learning, engagement, and teacher effectiveness. Fraser-Smith (2016) further emphasized that resource sharing promotes collaboration and maximizes access to educational resources. Rashid and Wong (2022) also highlighted that teachers often struggle with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to effectively support learners with special needs. In addressing diverse learning needs, Tomlinson (2014) stressed that differentiated instruction is an effective approach because it allows teachers to adapt learning experiences according to students' abilities and preferences. Moreover, Morales et al. (2020) found that lack of parental support negatively affects students' academic performance and well-being. Ando et al. (2024) emphasized that parental involvement is essential in improving students' academic engagement and attendance. Finally, Achelpohl et al. (2018) and Carciotto et al. (2020) underscored the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities in creating a supportive learning environment that addresses students' academic and emotional needs.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be generally concluded that the study reveals the significant impact of the National Learning Camp on teachers' dedication and effectiveness, as well as the key challenges they faced during implementation. The program fostered a positive learning environment and helped improve academic performance in essential subjects. Teachers emphasized the value of thorough preparation and the need to deliver diverse and inclusive education.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers may prioritize ongoing professional development by taking advantage of free training, seminars, and workshops to implement National Learning Camp. Mentorship and collaborative professional relationships are also valuable. Maintain resilience, positive thinking and weekly devotions to avoid mental exhaustion.
2. It is recommended that the National Learning Camp coordinator enhance the teachers' pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices, and that the coping strategies suggested be considered.
3. School administrators may provide equal access to training, seminars, and workshops and, if possible, implement a mentoring program to support teachers in implementing National Learning Camp, and ensure equal distribution of learning resources intended for the program's implementation.
4. A strong parent engagement and involvement with the school may be established and closely monitored to observe how parents and families support their children's academic achievement and well-being at school.
5. Future researchers may explore the program's long-term effects on teaching strategies and the contextual challenges educators experienced.

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