

Stepping into the Classroom: A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Beginner Teacher’s Journey

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of elementary beginner teachers as they embark on their journey into the classroom setting, the context of their experiences, and how elementary beginner teachers foresee the future. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach with purposeful sampling was employed to gather data. This study utilized a phenomenological interview with seven participants, who were selected using the snowball technique to extract the most authentic and reliable data, which was analyzed using van Manen’s existential lifeworld elements. Results showed that elementary beginner teachers experienced numerous challenges, emotions like excitement and nervousness, time management, rewarding experiences, transitioning roles, building rapport with students, and collegial, and parent-teacher relationships. The context of the lived experiences of the beginner elementary teachers were classroom management challenges, mentorship and support system, misalignment of the prepared program to actual teaching realities, and school climate adjustment. Teachers viewed their future by developing themselves professionally through pursuing graduate studies, pondering working abroad for financial stability, and developing faith and religion to consider cultural sensitivity and trusting God’s plan. The contribution of the beginner teachers gave insights that there is a need to embrace realities in the new work setting. Thus, a beginner teacher needs to be equipped beforehand and expect that challenges are part of becoming an effective teacher. Hence, it would be relevant for the next study to conduct any related research on the lived experiences of elementary teachers exploring their journey as a beginner in teaching.

Keywords: beginner teachers, classroom, experiences, journey

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the lived experiences of elementary beginner teachers in both public schools and private Adventist schools. Employing a phenomenological research approach, it aimed to seek the firsthand experiences of beginner elementary teachers as they go through the challenges and opportunities within the classroom setting. This study focused on unfolding the unique journey of beginner teachers, investigating the factors that contribute to their professional growth, and exploring how they adapt to the dynamic nature of teaching young learners. By capturing the lived experiences, observations, and reflections of these educators, the study sheds light on the complexities of the early stages of a teaching career and

provides a valuable framework for educational institutions, policymakers, and future teachers, seeking to enhance the support and development of beginner teachers in elementary education.

The Philippine Professional Standard for Teachers (PPST) defines beginning teachers as those who have passed the LET and are starting their professional teaching careers. Wolff et al. (2014) stated that beginning teachers struggle to integrate a range of knowledge into their teaching and fall short in attending closely to student’s learning. There have been a substantial number of recent studies on the journey of beginning teachers in the teaching profession. In the Philippines, certain teachers in their first year of work face challenges in obtaining high-quality training and growth opportunities as a result of limited funding for professional development programs and insufficient support from educational institutions (Oracion, 2023). Ironically, the Republic Act 10533 Section 7 stipulated that educational authorities must implement training programs to ensure that the basic education curriculum meets the needs of teachers. Unfortunately, other schools may not implement the said programs and assist the newly hired elementary teachers. Basturk and Tastepe (2015) argued that classroom management is one of the problems experienced by elementary beginner teachers. Other than that, elementary teachers often have a heavy workload that includes preparing lesson plans, assessing student performance, and attending meetings and training (Llego, 2017).

Andrew University, a Seventh-Day Adventist institution in Berrien, promulgated a mentorship program called “First Days of School Experience”. This program focused on classroom management as viewed as one of the observed struggles among beginning teachers. (The Journal of Adventist Education, 2013). However, the survey revealed that many teachers feel that there is a gap between the theories and strategies they learn in educational programs and the actual experiences they face in the classroom. Gholam (2018) suggested that school leaders must give attention to beginning teachers by providing them with mentoring programs. The school must be able to support the transition – from qualifying to actually teaching – of beginning teachers (Shanks et al., 2020). Such action will increase teacher retention in their professional job and promote collaboration in the teaching environment.

Thus, the goal of this study was to explore and understand the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by elementary beginner teachers as they take their first step into the classroom. The study sought to utilize a phenomenological approach to gain insight into the unique journey of these teachers, determined the factors affecting their professional growth and experience and sought to aid supporting systems and potential development strategies to navigate the challenges encountered by these teachers in their early teaching careers. The discussion of the lived experiences of beginner teachers especially primary educators has been recorded in history across the globe. It results in the implementation of different educational programs that address the needs of every beginner teacher to the attainment of a productive and efficient teaching career. The purpose of this study is to discover elementary beginner teachers’ journey. Specifically, this study answered the following research questions: What are the lived experiences of elementary beginner teachers as they go through their journey into the classroom? What is the context of the lived experiences of elementary teachers? How do elementary beginner teachers foresee the future?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is organized and categorized into four sections including: Common challenges and difficulties that novice teachers encounter, Transition to the teaching profession, Teacher identity development, Mentoring and support for beginner teachers, and Classroom management and strategies.

Challenges Among Beginner Teachers

Elementary school teachers, especially those just starting, face a variety of challenges in their careers. According to Smith (2021), one major difficulty is managing classroom behavior. Beginner teachers often struggle with establishing discipline systems and routines that lead to an organized, productive environment. They also tend to have problems addressing behavior issues, like students who act out or do not follow directions (Jones, 2020). They also frequently lack training in teaching special needs children who may require specialized instructional strategies and accommodations (Taylor, 2022). However, overcoming adversity early in an elementary teaching career has a steep learning curve that tries one's perseverance and resourcefulness.

Emotional Challenges

Emotional challenges described by beginning teachers include poor school climate and relationships with colleagues (Harmsen et al., 2018). They find it hard to manage the different behaviors of their students (Maitla, Joiya, Yasin, Naveed, & Waqas, 2018). A lot of them feel like they do not have anyone to talk to about the challenges they are facing as they feel isolated from their colleagues (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 2014). Being a new teacher has been described as lonely (McCormack & Thomas, 2003) and without much room to influence one's surroundings (MacPhail & Tannehill, 2012). Prolonged teacher stress negatively correlates with job satisfaction and positively correlates with intending to leave the teaching profession.

Pedagogical Challenges

The challenge in creating clear and consistent rules inside the classroom is due to a lack of experience in understanding what rules are essential and how to communicate them effectively to students. Wong and Wong (2019) stated that beginner teachers find it challenging to connect with a diverse group of students, understand their individual needs, and create a supportive rapport. Having no clear vision of what their classroom should look and feel like.

Classroom management strategies

Wong and Wong (2019) asserted that the most effective classroom management strategies are those that are proactive rather than reactive. This means that teachers should focus on preventing disruptive behavior from happening in the first place, rather than simply responding to it after it occurs. In connection with this, Evertson and Emmer (2014) propounded also their advocacy that the goal of classroom management is to create a positive learning environment in which all students can succeed.

Transition to the Teaching Profession

This pertains to the transition from pre-service training to actual classroom practice which can be challenging one for novice teachers. They are often faced with several new demands and responsibilities, and they may feel overwhelmed and unsure of themselves. Colleagues can offer support and camaraderie and administrators can provide resources while family members can offer emotional support and understanding (Boe and Duke, 2006).

It provides new teachers with opportunities to learn from experts, collaborate with other teachers, and reflect on their teaching practices (Guskey, 2000). The best way for teachers to learn is to observe and participate in effective teaching practices (Joyce and Showers, 2002)

Mentoring and support for beginner teachers

This theme pertains to the importance of mentoring and support programs for novice teachers, where the effectiveness of such programs matters in providing guidance, encouragement, and professional growth opportunities. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) supplied the idea that induction programs can play an important role in supporting novice teachers and reducing turnover. Effective induction programs offer new teachers’ opportunities to learn from experienced mentors, engage in diverse teaching activities, receive professional development on key topics like classroom management and lesson planning, and build relationships with peers and school staff.

Theoretical Framework

This phenomenological study drew on two foundational theories. Reflective practice involves supporting new teachers in reflecting on and interpreting their experiences to enhance their skills as educators (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Additionally, phenomenology aims to align the researcher's past and present experiences with those of the participants (Creswell, 1998). John Dewey's reflective paradigm and David Kolb's model of experiential learning together provide a robust framework for capturing the multidimensional nature of induction.

METHODS

Sampling

This study consists of seven (7) participants who underwent an interview. Two (2) of these participants were from private schools and the remaining five (5) were from public schools. The participants were chosen because they could give the researchers the most pertinent data and help them come to insightful findings. The researchers chose the participants according to the following criteria: (a) Full-time elementary teacher with 1- 5 years’ experience (b) employed at current public or private school (c) can provide a meaningful experience, (d) willing to participate in the study (e) referred by the principal. The criteria were selected according to the research purpose which is to explore the experiences of Elementary beginner teachers. After identifying the participants, the researchers used snowball sampling, also called chain sampling. In-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes with 7 diverse novice BEED teachers were allowed extensive narration of induction while balancing depth and breadth of emergent interpretations, lending credibility.

This study was conducted in private school in Digos Davao del Sur, and public schools in Camanchiles Matanao, Davao del Sur, and Cateel, Davao Oriental. The researchers intended to expand the scope to accurately pick reflective participants in this research. Cateel is a 2nd class municipality in the province of Davao Oriental. Camanchiles Elementary School, Digos Central Adventist Academy, and Camanchiles Elementary School are the schools conducted by this study. Moreover, the school settings were known to be the target place in this study, as the schools has number of novice teachers in their 1-5 years in service and the inclusion criteria is suited in their profiles.

Table 1.
Distribution of Participants

Schools	Number of Teachers
Cateel	3
Digos	2
Camanchiles	2

Total	7
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Data Collection

In collecting the data, an invitation letter was sent to the target participants during the data collection phase of the study, requesting their consent to be interviewed. During the interview, the researcher used an audio recorder to ensure all the information gathered from the participants were recorded. Semi-structured questionnaire was utilized that was validated by the experts in the Teacher Education Department of South Philippine Adventist College. The researcher confirmed the approval of the school principal after successfully presenting the researchers were given a letter informing them to permit the conduct of the interview. The researcher submitted applications detailing the proposed qualitative study, data collection methods, research goals, interview protocols, and plans for confidential data handling to the district review boards as outlined in district research policies. After signing and allowing the researcher to conduct an interview, the researcher started collecting the data at the agreed time and place the requested topic. The seven participants were interviewed via face to face, then the transcription of the collected data in verbatim. A letter of gratitude was given to the participants. The participants were asked to clarify any points or add to their interview resources; after a thorough reading, no changes were made in the data.

Data Analysis

van Manen (1990) provided the data analysis for this investigation. For phenomenological hermeneutic investigations, this method is employed. Phenomenological themes may be seen as the structures of experiences" after the compilation of life events. These structures are thought of being interpretations of the phenomenon.

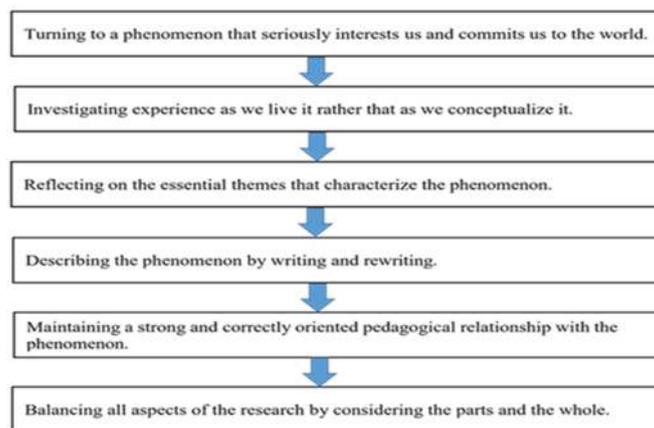


Figure 1. Data Analysis process by van Mannen (1990)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lived Experiences of Elementary Beginner Teachers in the Classroom

The purpose of the first question was to examine the experiences of the beginner teachers in the classroom. The participants' responses were arranged according to the existential

lifeworld elements of van Manen. Table 1 shows the extracted themes and codes of the participants’ responses, which talked about their experiences as beginner teachers.

Table 2
Experiences of Beginning Teachers in the Classroom

Lifeworld Elements	Categories	Themes
Corporeality (Lived body)	Emotional Experience Motivation Personal and Professional Satisfaction.	Emotional and Psychological Effect
Spatiality (Lived Space)	Diversity in class Responsibilities tied with career Student to teacher transition Pedagogical struggle	Challenges in Teaching
Temporality (Lived Time)	Making plans and schedules Prioritizing unfinished paperwork instead of taking nap times Prioritizing important and needed tasks over others.	Time Management Utilization
Relationality	Creating conversation with students Treating students as their own child Cultivating closeness towards students. Relationship with leaders/administrators Parent feedback about student's responsiveness Communicating with parents in regards to their child’s performance Managing parents’ high expectation	Building rapport with students Collegial Relationships Parent-Teacher Relationships.
Materiality (lived things)	Purchasing Supplementary Materials Compensating for Lack of Materials Advanced Preparation of Activities and Visual Aids Maintaining Professional Appearance for Parents.	Resourcefulness and Preparation as a Novice Teacher

Corporeality (lived body)

van Manen (1990; 2014) emphasized that this element affects the understanding of how the body is encountered concerning the phenomenon. This described the elementary beginner teacher’s reaction when they enter inside the classroom as a full-time teacher. They reported the emotional and psychological experiences of beginning teachers as they start their careers. Many teachers reported feeling nervous and embarrassed on their first day, despite prior training or experience with children. However, they also experienced excitement and enthusiasm. Despite challenges, teachers found motivation both extrinsically (through salary)

and intrinsically (by making a difference in students' lives). Seeing students grow and being regarded as an inspiration provided a sense of fulfillment (Cawdery, 2023). The text emphasized that students can be both a source of stress and a driving force for teachers to persist in their profession.

Spatiality (lived space)

van Manen (1990; 2014) defines spatiality as the lived space that influences how individuals experience and perceive their environment. Three main areas of difficulty emerge: managing classroom diversity, transitioning from student to teacher roles, and struggling with pedagogical strategies. Teachers found it challenging to cater to diverse student needs, especially when unfamiliar with students' personalities and behaviors. The abrupt transition from being a student to becoming a teacher presented another hurdle, particularly when assigned to teach subjects or grade levels different from their training. Many beginning teachers also struggled with selecting and implementing effective teaching strategies, often feeling lost or overwhelmed (Saidin and Veloo, 2021)

Temporality (live time)

van Manen (1990; 2014) explained temporality as the lived time that shapes our understanding of past, present, and future experiences. The study explores the challenges and rewards faced by novice elementary teachers, focusing on time management, rewarding experiences, and role transitions. Despite these challenges, teachers find their experiences rewarding, particularly when witnessing student growth and helping struggling learners overcome difficulties. Packett, (2024) said that transition from student teacher to full-time educator involves taking on increased responsibilities and autonomy in classroom management and lesson planning. These experiences highlight the complex nature of novice teaching, emphasizing the importance of effective time management, the intrinsic rewards of student progress, and the significant role transition from student to teacher.

Relationality (lived self-other)

Van Manen (1990; 2014) describes relationality as the lived human relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them. The participants shared the multifaceted relationships they start in their early careers, focusing on building rapport with students, fostering collegial relationships, and managing parent-teacher interactions. They develop positive relationships with colleagues and administrators through active listening and open communication. This relates to the study of Eichholz (2017) emphasized that the importance of effective communication, empathy, and setting clear expectations. In managing parent-teacher relationships, novice teachers focus on providing regular updates about student progress, addressing concerns, and managing parental expectations.

Materiality (lived things)

Van Manen (1990; 2014) elaborated the concept of materiality as it pertains to how individuals perceive and interact with physical objects in relation to their experiences. In the narratives of novice teachers, materiality encompasses the materials they access and the creative ways they repurpose or supplement these resources to support their teaching. The lived experience of utilizing available materials, whether through purchasing, compensating for shortages, or employing advanced planning, showcases how educators navigate the practicalities and meanings attached to their resources. The participants also explained how they are confronted

with inadequate instructional materials, proactively seek solutions by purchasing supplementary resources with personal funds. This commitment not only enhances the learning experience for their students but also reflects a dedication to their professional responsibilities (Keeling, 2017).

Table 3
Context of the Lived Experiences of Elementary Beginner Teachers

Categories	Themes
Handling disruptive students Handling a student with developmental delays in reading Handling a student with developmental delays in motor skills	Classroom Challenges
Dealing with Spatial Constraints in the Classroom Adjusting to unfavorable classroom environment Focusing on classroom environment rather than external factors	Assessing the environmental context
Attending professional development and trainings Ongoing guidance and mentorship	Mentorship and Support System
Knowledge Gap between preparation program versus actual teaching realities	Dis-alignment of teaching preparation programs and the realities

The context of the lived experience of novice teachers highlighted the various significant challenges in managing classroom dynamics, where handling disruptive students emerges as a prominent theme. Some of the participants expressed feelings of frustration and loss of control when faced with disruptive behavior from students. To cope, they often rely on spiritual guidance, such as prayer, to help maintain their composure and patience during troubling situations. These anecdotes underscore the need for effective classroom management techniques to support novice teachers in maintaining a conducive learning environment (Med, 2018). Another critical theme involves the environmental challenges that novice teachers experience, including spatial constraints and unfavorable classroom conditions. Despite these limitations, educators adapt their teaching strategies, demonstrating resilience and creativity in providing quality instruction. For instance, one teacher emphasized that her dedication to helping students learn transcended the environmental issues, showcasing her commitment to teaching even in less-than-ideal circumstances (Scroggs, 2021). This adaptation reflects a broader trend among novice educators who often focus on nurturing student growth despite external obstacles. Teachers reported that attending learning action cells and receiving guidance from experienced educators significantly contributed to their ability to adapt and grow throughout their teaching careers. This ongoing mentorship fosters a collaborative environment that empowers novice teachers, enabling them to face classroom challenges with increased confidence and competence (Oplatka, 2009)

Table 4
Elementary Beginner Teachers Foresee the Future

Lifeworld Elements	Categories	Themes
Temporality (lived time)	Pursuing post-graduate education Continuous learning and knowledge education	Professional Growth
Materiality (lived things) and Spatiality (lived space)	Considering working broad for better financial opportunities Balancing personal desires with family responsibilities and needs	Financial Responsibilities
Relationality (lived self-other)	Trust in God’s plan for the future Dealing with religious differences and practices in workplace	Faith and Religion

Novice teachers express a strong desire for personal and professional growth, which is central to their development as effective educators over the next 5 to 10 years. They showcase their aspirations through two main categories: pursuing higher education and continuous learning. This sentiment aligns with findings from Darling-Hammond (2020) which highlighted that continuous training is vital for teacher development and ultimately impacts student outcomes positively. The necessity of continuous learning and knowledge acquisition to remain competent and provide quality education. This dedication reflects the broader trend identified by Ingersoll and Collins (2015) who suggest that ongoing professional development helps teachers navigate challenges and fosters a sense of agency in their careers.

Financial concerns also play a pivotal role in the lives of novice teachers, who must balance their aspirations for growth with familial responsibilities. Many expressed a desire to work abroad for better financial opportunities to support their families and ensure a brighter future for their children. Sutcher (2022) highlighted that financial considerations are a significant factor in teacher turnover and job satisfaction. Additionally, the participants' expressions of faith and trust in God's plan reveal a spiritual underpinning to their aspirations, suggesting that a strong commitment to their beliefs provides them with resilience in navigating challenges in their personal and professional lives.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATION

The study explored the lived experiences, contextual factors, and future aspirations of elementary beginner teachers through three key research questions. The first question deals with the teachers' experiences, revealing emotions, challenges, and personal growth in their early years. They experienced overwhelming emotions like excitement and nervousness, faced emotional challenges such as self-doubt, and grappled with the physical demands of the job. The teachers also developed crucial skills in time management and resourcefulness, utilizing strategies like schedules, prioritizing tasks, and compensating for lack of resources by purchasing their materials. This study found that the early years of teaching were both emotionally, psychologically, and physically taxing. Yet, teachers' management of time and resources led them to effectively handle workloads.

In the context of their experiences, the participants share that they encounter classroom challenges such as handling disruptive students and those with developmental delays, and had to adapt to environmental constraints while focusing on creating a positive classroom

environment. This study found that mentorship, professional development opportunities, and a positive school climate can help teachers cope with the challenges inside the classroom. Furthermore, participants' experiences have influenced their future perspectives, leading them to pursue higher education and another plan to work abroad for better financial opportunities however, the participants believe in God's plan. The results of the study may be valuable for the government as they determine the impact of the mentorship program. It is therefore recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted on the lived experiences of novice teachers would determine the educational system and the lives of beginner teachers. This longitudinal research could provide valuable insights for policymakers and education stakeholders in refining and enhancing programs mentorship and professional development opportunities to be effective in their teaching. Schools may consider revisiting their teacher preparation programs to ensure alignment with the current realities of teaching.

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