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ABSTRACT

The Philippines has been grappling with a learning crisis even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis worsened due to the educational disruptions brought about by the pandemic, as reflected in the 2022 PISA results. In response to these challenges and to addressing learning deficiencies while supporting recovery efforts, the Department of Education launched the National Learning Camp (NLC). Since its implementation in 2023, research on the NLC has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving student performance and engagement. However, its implementation has faced significant challenges, particularly a limited pool of teacher-volunteers due to its reliance on voluntary recruitment. This shortage has led to the deployment of out-of-field teachers, highlighting an underexplored aspect of the program. This study examines the lived experiences of out-of-field public secondary education teachers participating in the NLC within the Philippine context. Utilizing a phenomenological design, the research was conducted in a mega school in the Lapu-Lapu City Division, Cebu Region VII, Philippines.

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines has been grappling with a learning crisis even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis worsened due to the educational disruptions brought about by the pandemic, as reflected in the 2022 PISA results. In response to these challenges and to addressing learning deficiencies while supporting recovery efforts, the Department of Education launched the National Learning Camp (NLC). Since its implementation in 2023, research on the NLC has demonstrated its effectiveness in improving student performance and engagement. However, its implementation has faced significant challenges, particularly a limited pool of teacher-volunteers due to its reliance on voluntary recruitment. This shortage has led to the deployment of out-of-field teachers, highlighting an underexplored aspect of the program. This study examines the lived experiences of out-of-field public secondary education teachers participating in the NLC within the Philippine context. Utilizing a phenomenological design, the research was conducted in a mega school in the Lapu-Lapu City Division, Cebu Region VII, Philippines. Eight out-of-field teachers were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (1) they were regular, permanent employees of the Department of Education; (2) they taught subjects in the NLC outside their areas of specialization; and (3) they had participated in the NLC at least once, ensuring familiarity with the program. Thematic analysis of their interview responses revealed four major themes: their motivations for participating in the NLC, the frustrations and challenges they encountered, their coping strategies, and their best practices in navigating the program. This study provides valuable insights into the

contextual experiences of out-of-field teachers and their role in the success and sustainability of educational interventions like the NLC.

Keywords: experience, national learning camp, out-of-field, phenomenology.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Philippines was already grappling with a learning crisis according to the World Bank report in 2020. This crisis worsened due to educational disruptions caused by the pandemic, which resulted in significant learning gaps and heightened challenges in implementing and adapting to distance learning (Boholano et al., 2022; Jamon et al., 2021). This alarming issue was reflected in the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, where the Philippines ranked among the lowest-performing countries. The results from this international standardized assessment revealed critical deficiencies in students' foundational skills, such as literacy, numeracy, and scientific competencies (OECD, 2023).

In response to these challenges, the government, through the Department of Education (DepEd), launched a strategic initiative to address learning deficiencies and support recovery efforts. The National Learning Camp (NLC) serves as a key component of the broader National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP) which was established under DepEd Order No. 14, Series of 2023. This program consists of a voluntary three- to five-

week initiative, structured around three distinct camps: the Intervention Camp, the Consolidated Camp, and the Enhancement Camp (DepEd, 2023).

This initiative not only addresses local educational needs but also aligns with global priorities, particularly the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal for Quality Education, which emphasizes equitable access to inclusive and high-quality education. The NLC seeks to improve foundational skills, enhance learner performance, and build teacher capacity through offering targeted support to both learners and teachers during school breaks. These efforts demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that education recovery contributes to both national goals and global educational equity (Cacho & Santos, 2024).

Since the NLC has been implemented for two years, research on its effectiveness has primarily focused on its impact in various areas. Studies have examined the program's efficacy in improving literacy and numeracy (Maguate et al., 2024) as well as its influence on academic performance. Additional research explored the perceived effects of the NLC on students' interest, socio-emotional skills, personal growth, and character development (Gagabe et al., 2024), with findings indicating that the program is effective in achieving its objectives.

While the NLC presented a promising solution to the learning crisis, its implementation encountered significant challenges. A key issue was its reliance on voluntary teacher recruitment, which resulted in a limited pool of participants. Consequently, this shortage led to the deployment of out-of-field teachers—educators tasked with teaching subjects or grade levels outside their area of specialization (Ingersoll, Hoxby & Scrupski, 2004). Despite their willingness to support the program, these teachers encountered unique challenges in delivering effective instruction, engaging students, and adapting to unfamiliar content.

Based on a comprehensive review of related literature and studies, no research has yet explored the contextual experiences of out-of-field

teachers in the National Learning Camp in the Philippines. To address this gap, this phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of out-of-field public secondary education teachers participating in the National Learning Camp within the Philippine context.

II. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of out-of-field secondary public-school teachers in the Philippines during the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC). Specifically, the study aimed to understand their reasons for participating in the camp, the frustrations and challenges they encountered, as well as their coping strategies and best practices.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study used a Phenomenological research design because it dwells on the lived experiences of out-of-field public school teachers' and how they perceive and describe their experiences while teaching in the National Learning Camp.

3.2 Research Locale and Participants

The study focused on a mega school in Lapu-Lapu City Division, Region VII, Philippines, which participated in the NLC in 2023 and 2024. Twenty-five teachers participated in 2023. However, the number decreased to nineteen teacher-volunteers in 2024. Eight out-of-field teachers were selected as participants through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) they were regular, permanent DepEd employees; (2) they taught subjects at the NLC outside their areas of specialization; and (3) they had participated in the NLC at least once, ensuring familiarity with the program.

3.3 Data Analysis

The semi-structured interview guide questions developed by the researchers was used to collect the necessary data. It was validated to ensure that it aligns with the objective of the study and is easy

for participants to understand (Boholano, Merin & Dapat, 2021). Formal letters were sent to participants informing them that the research was purely academic, posed no risks, and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Upon receiving their written consent, the teachers were interviewed. The responses were audio recorded, coded and then analyzed to identify common themes and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2017).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the data, the researchers organized, analyzed, and structured the teachers' narratives, identifying five major themes that emerged from their experiences in National Learning Camp.

Theme 1: Passion for teaching, professional growth, and external incentives drove the participation of out-of-field teachers in the NLC.

The participation of out-of-field teachers in the NLC reflects a blend of intrinsic passion and extrinsic rewards that collectively motivate educators to step beyond their areas of expertise. At the heart of their involvement lies their unwavering love for teaching, coupled with a desire for professional growth. Despite being assigned to subjects outside their specialization, many teachers demonstrated enthusiasm and dedication, driven by their commitment to positively impacting students' lives.

As Teacher 1 shared, *"I was not forced; I was nominated. I like Math,"* while Teacher 3 echoed, *"I am very excited because I love teaching, no matter what subject it is."*

These statements emphasize that their passion for the craft outweighs the challenges of out-of-field teaching, highlighting their readiness to embrace unfamiliar roles to support learners. Equally significant was the opportunity for professional development. Teachers saw the NLC as a platform to expand their knowledge, gain practical experience, and acquire new skills that could strengthen their teaching practice.

Teacher 2 expressed this excitement, stating, *"I am really excited because it is a new learning*

opportunity," while Teacher 6 added, *"I volunteered because I want to gain experience."*

Such responses demonstrated a proactive approach to self-improvement, where educators sought to enhance their adaptability and expertise despite the challenges of teaching outside their field. The NLC emerged as a meaningful venue for fostering continuous learning and professional advancement. While intrinsic motivations dominated, extrinsic factors such as meal allowances, service credits, and productive use of vacation time provided practical support that further encouraged participation.

Teacher 4 shared, *"I want to join because, aside from being able to help the children, it also comes with a meal allowance and service credits,"* while Teacher 5 highlighted, *"I really volunteered so that I could get service credits and a meal allowance."* Similarly, Teacher 6 noted, *"When I heard about the NLC, I really wanted to join because, aside from the allowance, I could spend my vacation in a productive way."* These insights reveal that while passion and growth aspirations drove teachers to join, the tangible incentives offered by the program made their participation more practical and rewarding.

The participation of out-of-field teachers in the NLC reflects the importance of intrinsic motivators like passion for teaching and professional growth, alongside the reinforcing power of extrinsic incentives. To sustain and expand such engagement, the government can enhance extrinsic rewards by offering higher allowances, additional service credits, career development opportunities, and public recognition. Strengthening these incentives will not only acknowledge the efforts of passionate educators but also encourage their continued participation in similar initiatives, fostering a motivated, adaptable, and resilient teaching workforce that benefits the education system (Kumar & Hossain, 2017).

Theme 2: Out-of-field teachers faced frustrations in the NLC due to administrative burdens and financial strain.

Out-of-field teachers encounter a range of frustrations that hinder their full participation. While these teachers remain motivated to engage in the NLC, the combination of administrative burdens and financial strain can be overwhelming, often leading to a reconsideration of their involvement.

One of the main issues faced by these teachers is the extensive documentation required for participation. Many out-of-field teachers mentioned that the NLC's bureaucratic processes, such as the submission of numerous reports, can be time-consuming and burdensome. The need for anecdotal reports and accomplishment reports, for instance, was highlighted by two participants as a significant hurdle:

"I probably won't participate anymore because it's difficult, there are many documents required, like anecdotal and accomplishment reports." (T1)

"I am reluctant to join again because there are many accomplishment reports." (T8)

For these teachers, the amount of paperwork they are expected to handle detracts from their teaching responsibilities. This issue is compounded by the delayed approval of service credits, which further discourages participation. The frustration is echoed in the following quote:

"I did not participate anymore because the service credit approval took too long. There were also many requirements that needed to be complied with." (T6)

These delays in administrative processing can lead to a sense of disillusionment, especially for teachers who are already balancing heavy workloads. They may feel that the return on their investment of time and effort is insufficient, which ultimately contributes to their decision to withdraw from the NLC.

In addition to the administrative challenges, out-of-field teachers also face significant financial strain. Participation in the NLC often requires teachers to cover their own expenses, such as

purchasing resources or materials needed for student activities. One participant noted:

"The allowance takes a long time to be received. I sometimes have to dig into my own pocket when there are resources that need to be used." (T7)

This financial burden can become particularly overwhelming, especially when teachers are expected to fund essential aspects of the NLC activities, such as snacks or rewards for students. This issue is highlighted by another teacher:

"It's costly. The rewards and snacks given to the students are not shouldered by the school." (T8)

Teachers often find themselves in a position where they are expected to personally bear the cost of enriching student experiences, which can strain their personal finances. This financial pressure, combined with the ongoing administrative demands, creates an environment where teachers may feel unsupported by the system, leading to frustration and burnout.

Despite these significant challenges, many teachers continue to engage in the NLC out of a deep commitment to their students' well-being and educational success. Their drive to provide the best possible learning experience for their students often overrides the frustration caused by these external factors. Nonetheless, the ongoing issues related to administrative and financial burdens must be addressed to ensure that teachers can participate meaningfully without undue strain.

This theme emphasizes the need for systemic changes in the NLC, such as streamlined administrative processes and increased financial support for teachers. The NLC could improve teacher retention and participation by lowering administrative burdens and providing timely financial assistance, benefiting both educators and students in the long run.

Theme 3: Out-of-field teachers in the NLC face challenges due to limited pedagogical expertise,

time, and resources not tailored to students' needs.

Out-of-field teachers in the NLC reportedly faced significant challenges despite being familiar with the subject matter. Their lack of teaching experience in those specific subjects, combined with the responsibility of managing challenging students and navigating unfamiliar resources, compounded the difficulties they encountered. This observation is supported by the study of Du Plessis (2013), which highlights the complexities and pressures faced by out-of-field teachers in adapting to their assigned roles effectively. This theme was evident from the responses of the teachers.

Teacher 1 mentions, *"I don't have any problem teaching math because I'm already familiar with it since it was taught to me in my undergraduate studies"* expressing comfort with teaching math due to prior exposure in their undergraduate studies. However, the teacher continues, *"I find it challenging to teach those in the intervention camp because the children need one-on-one attention, especially since they lack foundational knowledge"* indicating the challenge of addressing students' foundational knowledge gaps in an intervention camp setting.

Teacher 4 also highlights the difficulty in handling students' lack of basic knowledge, stating, *"I get confused with the flow of the NLC lesson structure, so I'll just modify it and add a fun-filled activity for the children to motivate them"*. This emphasizes how the structured lessons in the NLC curriculum sometimes do not align with the students' needs, necessitating modifications and additional engaging activities to maintain motivation and participation.

Out-of-field teachers also struggle with resources, often feeling that the provided materials are difficult to work with. Teacher 2 shares, *"I have a small struggle with the resource because it still needs to be studied,"* which reflects the extra effort required to understand and adapt the resources provided. In some cases, the content of the modules is seen as too detailed and difficult to use effectively within the limited time frame.

Teacher 8 expresses, *"The resources in the module are hard to follow because they are too verbose. There's a lot of content, but the time is very limited,"* showing the challenge of dealing with verbose resources that cannot be fully covered in the short time available.

The theme also touches on the need to engage students in meaningful ways, as teachers recognize that simply following the module is not enough. Teacher 3 explains, *"It's also not possible to just stick to the module because the children need to be engaged. That's why I customize the activities to fit to the students,"* underscoring the necessity of customizing activities to maintain student interest and engagement, especially when students' attendance may fluctuate.

Furthermore, the challenge of balancing content delivery with remediation is evident. Teacher 2 with a background in customer contact services through TLE (Technology and Livelihood Education) shares, *"I feel that my specialization is somehow aligned with English because customer contact services is part of TLE,"* which shows how his specialization in TLE and customer service correlates with teaching English. However, the lack of foundational knowledge in students, combined with the need to address the specific teaching strategies, places additional pressure on the teacher. *"It is really important to plan the activities well so that the children will enjoy them, especially since it's a camp"* he emphasizes, noting the importance of carefully planning engaging activities to prevent students from losing interest, especially given the challenge of maintaining attendance in the camp.

The challenges faced by out-of-field teachers in the NLC program highlight the need for targeted professional development, flexible curricula, and resources tailored to diverse student needs (Du Plessis, 2013b). Familiarity with a subject does not guarantee effective teaching, especially when addressing significant learning gaps. This calls for differentiated instruction and scaffolded lesson plans to accommodate varying student proficiency levels.

The need for teachers to modify activities and adapt lesson structures suggests that rigid, one-

size-fits-all modules may not suit intervention programs. Training in adaptive teaching strategies and developing concise, user-friendly materials can help bridge this gap.

Finally, the emphasis on engaging students through novel approaches such as fun-filled activities and personalized learning emphasizes the value of motivation and participation. Equipping teachers with the necessary tools, time, and training to foster meaningful learning experiences is critical for improving outcomes in intervention programs such as the NLC.

Theme 4: Out-of-field teachers view LAC sessions as a key opportunity to share and learn best practices in teaching during the NLC.

The Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions have emerged as a crucial support mechanism for out-of-field teachers, particularly during the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC). These sessions provided a collaborative platform for teachers assigned to subjects beyond their areas of expertise to share strategies, resources, and innovative practices as supported by the study of Silva (2021). The quotes from participating teachers illustrate the multifaceted benefits of these sessions.

As Teacher 1 noted, *"We share best practices during the LAC sessions,"* emphasizing the collaborative nature of these gatherings. Teachers valued LAC sessions as indispensable spaces for exchanging effective strategies and ideas. Teacher 5 echoed this by stating, *"I think the LAC sessions were a great help. We were able to brainstorm during the sessions and study the resources,"* while Teacher 7 added, *"We get to see what they have done, and there is open communication where we can share ideas and resources."*

Additionally, Teacher 2 shared, *"I also share how I give chips because it is effective,"* while Teacher 4 noted, *"Sometimes, we combine our classes and do fun-filled activities with the students. They get reward like badges and points"*. These responses emphasize that LAC sessions not only foster collaboration but also enable teachers to exchange innovative pedagogical approaches, such as using badges and points, which have been shown to

enhance student engagement (Nilubol, 2023; Arsyad et al., 2024). Furthermore, out-of-field teachers can integrate these reward-system into fun-filled activities or adapt them based on their teaching preferences, promoting a more engaging and personalized learning experience (Ofril & Ofril, 2025).

Moreover, LAC sessions provided opportunities to share alternative resources such as videos, which are effective in reducing cognitive load and enhancing learning (Ofril et al., 2024). Worksheets were also highlighted as valuable tools. Teacher 2 shared, *"During LAC, I share videos about lessons,"* demonstrating how multimedia resources can engage students and simplify complex concepts. Similarly, Teacher 5 noted, *"During this time, we also printed our worksheets and activities,"* emphasizing the practical aspect of resource preparation during these sessions.

For out-of-field teachers, who often face challenges due to limited familiarity with their assigned subjects, learning from the experiences and methods of their colleagues offered practical solutions and boosted their confidence. This shared learning fostered a supportive and empowering professional community. These responses illustrate how LAC sessions foster collaboration, resource-sharing, and open dialogue among teachers.

V. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study provided valuable insights into the complex experiences of out-of-field teachers participating in the National Learning Camp (NLC). The data revealed four key themes that captured the teachers' motivations, challenges, and professional growth during their involvement. Teachers were primarily driven by intrinsic factors, such as their passion for teaching and professional development, as well as extrinsic rewards like meal allowances and service credits. These motivators helped teachers overcome the challenges of teaching subjects outside their specialization, highlighting the importance of balancing both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to sustain teacher engagement.

However, despite their dedication, teachers faced significant frustrations due to administrative hurdles and financial constraints. The bureaucratic demands, including extensive documentation and delayed service credits, led to disillusionment, and in some cases, prompted teachers to reconsider their participation. Financial pressures also played a role, with teachers often having to fund certain aspects of NLC activities from their own pockets, limiting their capacity to fully engage in the program.

Moreover, out-of-field teachers faced challenges related to their limited pedagogical expertise in the assigned subjects, lack of time, and insufficient resources that did not adequately address students' learning gaps. Although teachers were familiar with the content, managing the students' gaps in knowledge required substantial adjustments in their teaching methods and materials. This underscored the need for differentiated teaching strategies and curriculum flexibility to meet diverse student needs effectively.

Despite these challenges, the Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions proved to be a valuable source of support. They provided a platform for teachers to share best practices, resources, and innovative teaching strategies. Teachers appreciated these collaborative sessions as opportunities to learn from colleagues and develop practical solutions to overcome the challenges they faced, fostering a sense of community and empowerment that helped improve their teaching practices. Overall, the study demonstrates that while out-of-field teachers in the NLC face numerous challenges, they remain deeply committed to their professional growth and to ensuring the success of their students.

To better support the out-of-field teachers, the NLC initiative should streamline administrative processes, ensure timely service credits, and reduce teacher workloads to enable them to focus more on teaching and student outcomes. Increasing financial support through consistent allowances or compensation would also help alleviate teachers' financial burdens. Providing targeted teaching materials and resources that

address students' specific learning gaps is crucial, especially for teachers working outside their area of expertise. Expanding the frequency and scope of LAC sessions will further promote collaboration, professional development, and the sharing of best practices. Finally, specialized training programs for out-of-field educators will enhance their confidence and competence in teaching unfamiliar subjects. Implementing these recommendations will allow the NLC initiative to better support out-of-field teachers, improve their teaching effectiveness, and lead to better student learning outcomes.

Suggestions

Because the NLC initiative is relatively new and only in its second year of implementation, future research could look into its long-term impact on teacher performance and student outcomes. Studies could assess the effectiveness of targeted professional development programs for out-of-field teachers, as well as the impact of financial support on teacher retention and satisfaction. Furthermore, research could look into the role of expanded LAC sessions in promoting teacher collaboration, improving teaching practices, and addressing specific student learning gaps. Exploring novel training methods, such as incorporating technology and gamified learning, may improve the adaptability and proficiency of out-of-field teachers. Finally, future research could focus on developing and evaluating strategies for scaling the NLC initiative while maintaining its quality and effectiveness across a variety of educational settings.

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