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BARE WALLS: STORIES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ON THE NEW DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OPERATION BAKLAS PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my study was to find out the experiences of elementary school teachers as they implemented the Operation Baklas as mandated by the Department of Education all over the country. This study used qualitative research employing phenomenology. Interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. This study was conducted at Balisong, Talomo, Santo Tomas Davao del Norte as they implemented the program. Operation Baklas, an initiative aimed at removing campaign materials and ensuring a clean and orderly school environment during election periods, has significant effects on elementary teachers. While the operation serves a broader societal purpose, it impacts teachers emotionally, professionally, and socially. The following discussion explores its effects on five key aspects: Emotional Impact, Compliance and Adaptation, Challenge of Change, Student Positive Response, and School Positive Impression.

KEYWORDS- *Bare Walls, Stories of Elementary School Teachers, Department of Education, Operation Baklas Program*

INTRODUCTION

Classroom structure plays an important role in the teaching and learning process of the school. In terms of the teaching activities, the structure of the room provides ample space for all the needed classroom activities as deemed necessary and as called for by the topics and lessons being conducted. Further, the classroom structure is one of the important factors leading to the achievement of all the lesson objectives and activities. The wider and better the classroom space there is, the better the outcomes of the class activities.

Additionally, aside from the classroom structure, an other factor that may or may not influence the teaching and learning activities are the visual aids that play a crucial role in communication, education, and information dissemination. Their importance lies in their ability to enhance understanding, engagement, and retention of information. Visual aids simplify complex concepts and make abstract information more concrete. They can clarify ideas, processes, and relationships, helping audiences better understand the subject matter. Visuals are inherently engaging and can capture the audience's attention. They break the monotony of text-based presentations and maintain interest, making the content more enjoyable and memorable.

Lee (2018) explained that the differing levels of visual literacy can be observed in Malaysia, a culturally diverse and multilingual country with a rich tapestry of ethnicities and languages. Visual literacy refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and create visual messages. In Malaysia, these differences in visual literacy can impact how people perceive and engage with visual aids. Malaysia is a multilingual country with Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) being the official language. Visual aids that rely heavily on text may pose challenges for those who are not proficient in Malay. Differing levels of visual literacy among ethnic groups can lead to variations in how visual aids are interpreted. What is clear and meaningful to one group may not be so for another, potentially resulting in misunderstandings. Visual aids that are not culturally sensitive may not resonate with the intended Malaysian audience. Insensitive visuals or messages may lead to a lack of engagement or even offense.

Differing visual literacy levels in Malaysia emphasize the need for culturally sensitive and contextually relevant visual aids. By acknowledging and addressing these differences, communicators can bridge gaps and facilitate effective communication and engagement in this diverse and multicultural nation.

Further, Susanto, A., & Fahmi, R. (2023) bared that interpretation variability of visual aids in Indonesia, a culturally diverse and multilingual country, is a significant consideration for effective communication. Indonesia's cultural richness, linguistic diversity, and regional variations can impact how people perceive and engage with visual information. The linguistic landscape of Indonesia includes Bahasa Indonesia (the official language) and numerous regional languages and dialects. Differences in language proficiency can affect how individuals interpret text-based visual aids. Visual aids that are not culturally sensitive may not resonate with the intended Indonesian audience.

Additionally, Davies, W. D. (2024) postulated that misinterpreted symbols or messages may lead to confusion or miscommunication. Indonesia's linguistic diversity can challenge the effectiveness of visual aids heavily reliant on text. Visuals that are text-heavy in Bahasa Indonesia may not be as accessible to speakers of regional languages or dialects.

Visual aids in the Philippines, like in many countries, can face various challenges that affect their effectiveness in communication and education. The Philippines is a diverse nation with distinct cultural, linguistic, and economic characteristics, which can lead to specific problems when using visual aids. The Philippines is a culturally diverse country with over 175 ethnolinguistic groups. Visual aids that do not consider cultural sensitivities or that do not resonate with the specific culture of the audience may lead to misunderstandings or offense (Warschauer, M., 2018).

Ocampo, A. (2024) posited that access to technology and equipment for displaying digital or multimedia visual aids can vary significantly between urban and rural areas. In rural regions, limited access to technology may hinder the use of advanced visual aids. Socioeconomic disparities can affect the availability of resources for creating and accessing visual aids. Low-income communities may have limited access to educational materials and technology.

Addressing these problems in the Philippines requires cultural awareness, adaptability, and a commitment to inclusivity. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, educators, presenters, and communicators can enhance the effectiveness of visual aids and promote more meaningful engagement in diverse Filipino communities.

In the local scenario, specifically in Balisong, Talomo, Santo Tomas Davao del Norte, I have observed that most of the elementary school teachers had several issues and concerns about their teaching strategies. Most of the elementary teachers in our area had experienced setbacks in terms of their teaching activities due to the removal of various teaching aids within the walls of their classrooms. Some teachers have relied so much on the teaching aids posted on the walls of their classrooms, on the other hand, the learners had quick access to the learning topics as may be found on the walls of their classrooms.

Further, other teachers were also delighted that the operation baklas had been implemented since most of their expenses incurred in the creation and posting of these visual aids were coming from their personal expenses. They felt the need to spend more money to put up the learning materials on their classroom walls. With the current move of the Department of Education in cleaning up the walls of their classrooms was as welcome policy.

During the time that Vice President Sara Z. Duterte was the DepEd Secretary, she called for the removal of all the visual aids on the walls of their classrooms, the teachers had to follow the orders and start anew with their classrooms teaching approaches without the visual aids on the walls. It is in this premise that this study is being conducted to extract the ideas of the elementary teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide the background and framework of the investigation, selected significant literature and readings related to the study were obtained in this section. This section includes principles, theories, concepts, and views regarding the area under study which was about the bare walls as a result of the Operation Baklas as mandated by the Secretary Sara Z. Duterte.

Mayer, R. E., & Moreno, R. (2023) discussed that posting visual aids can be a powerful way to communicate information, but it also comes with its own set of challenges and potential problems. Some common issues associated with posting visual aids are as follows: Overloading a visual aid with too much information can overwhelm the audience and reduce comprehension.

Duarte, N. (2018) explained that complex visuals may confuse the audience, making it difficult to grasp the main message. Visual aids may not be accessible to individuals with disabilities, such as those with visual impairments. Viewers may misinterpret or draw incorrect conclusions from visual representations : Poorly designed or prepared visual aids can lead to technical glitches during presentations. Visual aids that fail to engage the audience can result in disinterest or distraction. Graphs and charts can be manipulated to distort data, leading to misleading conclusions.

Pearson, C. A., & Young, A. T. (2023) posited that technical issues with equipment or software can disrupt the presentation. Visual aids that don't align with the topic or audience can be confusing or distracting. Remember that addressing these problems involves careful planning, design, and consideration of your audience. Additionally, staying updated with current best practices in visual communication and technology can help mitigate many of these challenges.

Visual aids offer numerous advantages in communication and education. They can enhance understanding, engagement, and retention of information. Here are some of the advantages of using visual aids, supported by references:
Enhanced Comprehension: Visual aids can simplify complex information, making it easier for the audience to understand. Enhanced comprehension through the use of visual aids is a critical aspect of effective communication and education. Visual aids can simplify complex information, engage the audience, and improve retention. Visual aids, such as diagrams, charts, and infographics, have the power to simplify complex information. They condense data and concepts into visual representations that are easier to grasp. Mayer and Moreno (2023) discuss how well-designed visual aids can reduce cognitive load and enhance comprehension by presenting information in a more accessible format.

Research by Guo, Kim, and Rubin (2018) on MOOC videos demonstrates how visual elements enhance student engagement. Engagement and Attention: Visual aids capture and maintain the audience's attention more effectively than text alone. When visuals are used strategically, they can draw the viewer's gaze and hold their interest.

Clarity and Simplification: Visual aids promote clarity by breaking down complex concepts into simpler parts. Tufte's work on data visualization (2019) emphasizes the importance of clear and effective visual communication to enhance comprehension.

Cheng and Lu (2020) found that visuals can enhance listening comprehension for foreign language learners, showcasing their potential for universal understanding. Visual aids transcend language barriers, making information accessible to a global audience. Visual aids enhance comprehension by simplifying complex information, capturing attention, improving retention, providing clarity, and facilitating universal understanding. These advantages are supported by research in cognitive psychology, education, and multimedia learning theory, demonstrating the significant impact visuals can have on communication and learning outcomes.

Spence, I., & Feng, J. (2018) suggested that using visual aids to enhance retention is a well-documented and effective strategy in education and communication. Here are discussions supported by relevant references on how visual aids improve retention: Visual aids capture and maintain the audience's attention. When learners are engaged with visual content, their sustained attention contributes to improved retention. The use of visuals, along with interactive elements, can enhance engagement and memory retention. Visual aids transform abstract concepts into concrete, tangible representations. This concreteness effect, as described by Nelson and Gruendel (2021), allows individuals to form mental images and associations, making the material more memorable and easier to recall.

Kim, Y. Y. (2021) emphasized that visual aids often impose structure and organization on information. Graphic organizers, such as concept maps or flowcharts, help learners see relationships and hierarchies. This structured presentation aids in the organization of knowledge in memory, making it more accessible for retrieval. Visual aids can serve as effective retrieval cues. When individuals need to recall information, the visual elements associated with that information act as cues that trigger memory retrieval. This is particularly valuable for students preparing for exams or professionals seeking to remember key points from presentations. Visual aids enhance retention by leveraging dual-coding theory, reducing cognitive load, capturing attention, providing concrete representations, offering organization and structure, acting as retrieval cues, and creating emotional impact. These strategies make information more accessible and memorable, benefiting learners and audiences in various educational and communicative contexts.

Research Questions

1. What are the stories of elementary school teachers as they implemented Operation Baklas in their classrooms?
2. How does the Operation Baklas affect the overall learning environment?
3. What educational management insights are drawn from the stories of the elementary school teachers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used qualitative research employing phenomenology. Interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. The interview(s) attempt to answer two broad questions (Moustakas, 1994). The data was then read and reread and culled for like phrases and themes that are then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process, the researcher constructed the universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

In this study, phenomenology attempts to extract the purest, untainted data and in some interpretations of the approach, bracketing is used by the researcher to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove him or herself from the process. One method of bracketing is memoing (Maxwell, 2013).

Research Participants

The study involves a total of eight (8) elementary teachers as participants. These selected teachers will specifically be from Balisong, Talomo, Santo Tomas Davao del Norte. The participants must have a minimum of three (3) years of teaching experience in elementary education. Regardless of their age, sex, or marital status, all selected participants will be teaching at the intermediate grade level in nearby schools.

Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size the quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions will lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five (5) to 25 and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (6). There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990).

Data Analysis

In this study, all the data collected were carefully examined and thoughtfully analyzed. The researcher first described personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. The researcher began with a full description of her own experience of the phenomenon. This is an attempt to set aside the researcher's personal experiences so that the focus can be directed to the participants. She developed a list of significant statements. She then finds statements about how individual was experiencing the topic, lists these significant statements as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping, statements. The researcher took the significant statements and then grouped them into larger units of information, called "meaning units" or themes. She wrote a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon. Next, she wrote a description of "how" the experience happened. This was called "structural description," and the inquirer reflects on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced. Finally, she wrote a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This passage is the "essence" of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study.

Thematic Content Analysis. A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. One of the advantages of thematic analysis is that it's a flexible method which can be used for both explorative studies, where the researcher does not have a clear idea of what patterns are being searched for, as well as for more deductive studies, where the researcher know exactly what she is interested in. No matter which type of study is being done and for what purpose, the most important thing in the analysis is that the researcher respects the data and try to represent the results of the interview as honestly as possible (Montensen, 2020).

Triangulation of Data. Triangulation means using more than one method to collect data on the same topic. This is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic, which involves different types of samples as well as methods of data collection. However, the purpose of triangulation is not necessarily to cross-validate data but rather to capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon (Alele, F. , 2023)

Environmental triangulation. The use of Environmental triangulation is limited only to those studies where the findings can be influenced by certain environmental factors. This type of triangulation uses different settings, locations and other factors such as time, day, and season in which the study took place. The idea is to determine which of these factors influence the information received, these factors are then changed to see if the findings are the same. If the findings remain unaltered under varying environmental factors, then validity can be established (Naeem, Saira, 2019). In this study, such triangulation was used considering that the requirements, as mentioned, are the use of environmental triangulation best suited to the environment of the research being conducted.

Framework of Analysis

According to Braun and Clark (2006) methods of qualitative data analysis fall in two groups. The first group consists of methods driven by an epistemological or theoretical position, which have limited variability in how they are applied within their frameworks, such as conversation analysis (CA) and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and methods which are situated within a broad theoretical framework and can therefore be used in a variety of ways within those frameworks, such as grounded theory (GT), discourse analysis (DA) narrative analysis (NA).

The second group includes methods independent of theory and epistemology, which can be applied across a range of different theoretical and epistemological approaches and are therefore very flexible. One such method is thematic analysis, which through the theoretical freedom "provides flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

She observes several steps in conducting thematic analysis. The first stage in extracting qualitative data for analysis from the recordings was transcription. This was done to gain greater familiarity with the data and deeper insight. I relied on my resources to do the transcription with the use of my personal computer and some reliable headphones. I used several nights to listen to the interviews to deepen my understanding on the nuances of the language and semantics of the participants.

Practice varied considerably in terms of agreeing on conventions with transcribers. Some negotiated themselves to lay out and conventions required, including researchers who wanted the kind of detailed transcriptions appropriate for conversations or narrative analysis. Others were sometimes less directly involved and accepted the conventions generally used by the one transcribing the information.

The next step was data extraction and analysis. I used manual techniques based on note-taking and summary while listening to the recordings. My manual technique usually included some process of verbatim recordings of selected spoken words. I selected quotations about central issues, or when what was said seemed important or interesting.

I used a number of different techniques as taught to me by my thesis adviser. I marked up transcripts with colored pens or sorted data by cutting and pasting. I used forms of thematic grids and charts, the framework technique as developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie et al, 2003). This technique was useful to me in the process of coding, sorting, and collecting data for interrogation. This technique was very useful in understanding

links and relationships between issues. All these efforts and procedures included saving verbatim spoken words from the transcripts, which could be cross-referenced to the thematic displays or the maps.

To summarize, the thematic analysis method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consisted of six (6) phases used in analyzing the data.
Phase 1. I familiarized myself with the data by reading the whole data set and noting down initial ideas.
Phase 2. I generated initial codes, with coded being the most basic segments of the raw data that can identify a feature of the data that appears interesting.
Phase 3. I searched for themes by sorting different codes into potential themes and collated all data extracts within identified themes.
Phase 4. I reviewed the themes and refined them further (at the level of coded data extracts and the entire data set) and produced a thematic map showing relationships between themes and sub-themes;
Phase 5. I defined and named themes, making sure they give the reader an immediate sense of what the theme is all about.
Phase 6. I wrote the report to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (within and across the themes), using data extracts embedded within an analytic narrative to make arguments in relation to the research question.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the summary of the study is presented, from the summary of the findings, I drew the implications and future directions. The purpose of my study was to find out the experiences of elementary school teachers as they implemented the Operation Baklas as mandated by the Department of Education all over the country. This study was conducted at Balisong, Talomo, Santo Tomas Davao del Norte as they implemented the program.

Operation Baklas, an initiative aimed at removing campaign materials and ensuring a clean and orderly school environment during election periods, has significant effects on elementary teachers. While the operation serves a broader societal purpose, it impacts teachers emotionally, professionally, and socially. The following discussion explores its effects on five key aspects: Emotional Impact, Compliance and Adaptation, Challenge of Change, Student Positive Response, and School Positive Impression.

The emotional attachment of Operation Baklas on elementary teachers can be considerable. Many teachers experience stress and anxiety due to the additional workload and responsibilities imposed on them. The sudden requirement to remove campaign materials, often within tight deadlines, can be overwhelming, especially for those who have personal political inclinations. Teachers who supported particular candidates may feel disappointed or conflicted about taking down campaign materials. Moreover, the pressure to comply with regulations while maintaining neutrality in a politically charged atmosphere can lead to emotional exhaustion.

In terms of compliance and adaptation, teachers must quickly adjust to the policies mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd) . Adapting to these requirements requires a balance between following orders and ensuring that the school remains a safe space for learning. As ther leemntary teachers copmply with the new school policies, they werfe able to adaprt easiy to the new changes in their classroom settings.

The challenge of change is another key issue that arises during Operation Baklas. Teachers, who are already managing numerous tasks, must accommodate additional responsibilities, a shift in priorities can disrupt lesson plans and daily routines, leading to frustration among educators. Moreover, resistance to change may arise, particularly among teachers who perceive the operation as an inconvenience rather than a necessity. Proper communication and support from school administrators can help alleviate these concerns and make the transition smoother.
Despite the challenges, students often respond positively to Operation Baklas. The initiative provides an opportunity for students to learn about cleanliness, and the importance of following important instructions in their schools. Seeing their teachers actively participate in upholding school regulations can inspire students to follow rules and engage in responsible academic practices. Additionally, the removal of instructional materials can create a more organized and visually appealing learning environment, which can improve students' focus and well-being.

Finally, the school benefits from a positive impression as a result of Operation Baklas. A clean school environment promotes a sense of professionalism and order. Parents and the community appreciate the school's commitment to upholding a clean environment. This initiative also strengthens the school's reputation as a safe and inclusive space for students. When schools consistently enforce policies that support academic values, they contribute to a culture of integrity and respect within the community.

In conclusion, while Operation Baklas presents challenges for elementary teachers, it also brings about positive outcomes. Teachers experience emotional strain and the challenge of adapting to changes, but their efforts contribute to student learning and a positive school environment. By embracing compliance, overcoming difficulties, and promoting responsible citizenship, teachers play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity of educational institutions during election periods.

In terms of the coping mechanisms of the elementary teachers, the fowling discussions are presented:
Teachers resorted to emotional coping strategies in facing a variety of stressors, from managing classroom behavior to meeting administrative demands, making emotional coping essential for maintaining well-being. Engaging in mindfulness practices, seeking peer support, and maintaining a positive mindset can help teachers regulate their emotions and prevent burnout. Additionally, self-care activities such as exercise, hobbies, and relaxation techniques can provide an emotional outlet, allowing teachers to recharge and approach their responsibilities with resilience and enthusiasm.

Effective time management helps teachers balance lesson planning, grading, and classroom activities while maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Prioritizing tasks, setting realistic deadlines, and utilizing digital tools such as planners or scheduling apps can enhance productivity. Additionally, breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps and delegating responsibilities, when possible, allows teachers to stay organized and reduce stress, ensuring they meet both professional and personal obligations efficiently.

Staying organized is crucial for elementary teachers to manage their workload and create a structured learning environment. Implementing systems such as labeled storage bins, digital folders for lesson plans, and well-maintained classroom schedules can improve efficiency and minimize chaos. Moreover, keeping a to-do list and maintaining a consistent routine can help teachers stay on track, making daily responsibilities more manageable and allowing them to focus more on student engagement and instruction.

Finally, the educational management insights were revealed:
Implementing Clear Policy Communication. Elementary teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that policies like Operation Baklas are effectively communicated to students, parents, and the community. Clear communication prevents misunderstandings and fosters cooperation, ensuring that everyone understands the rationale behind the policy. Teachers must simplify guidelines for young learners and engage parents through meetings or memos to reinforce the importance of maintaining a neutral and distraction-free learning environment. By being proactive in explaining policies, teachers can promote civic responsibility while maintaining a professional and politically impartial school setting.

Improving Resource Optimization. To support Operation Baklas, elementary teachers can contribute by ensuring that removed materials are repurposed rather than wasted. Posters and tarpaulins, for instance, can be recycled into teaching aids, art projects, or eco-friendly school materials. This approach not only aligns with sustainability practices but also teaches students the value of resourcefulness and environmental responsibility. By integrating this initiative into classroom activities, teachers can turn a seemingly routine policy implementation into a meaningful learning experience, reinforcing values of creativity, conservation, and responsible waste management.

Realigning Classroom Management Approaches. The implementation of Operation Baklas may require adjustments in classroom management, particularly in addressing students' curiosity about the current lessons. Establishing clear rules regarding cl; classroom instructional materials within the school can help maintain order while encouraging respectful participation of the learners. Additionally, teachers can use this initiative to promote inclusivity and critical thinking, guiding learners to understand the educational processes and changes within the classroom setting.
Future directions

For the School Principals to enhance the effectiveness of Operation Baklas, school principals may discuss new policies and guidelines among the teachers and stakeholders. By fostering a culture of compliance and sustainability, principals can encourage the learners and staff to actively participate in maintaining a clean and law-abiding school environment.
The elementary teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of new school policies. Through classroom discussions, hands-on activities, teachers can educate students on the importance of a clean study environment. Encouraging the learners to take part in clean-up drives and discussions about new technologies needed in classroom activities is good initiative.

The learners can contribute to better classroom environment by being active participants in keeping their school and community clean and organized. Through engagement in school-led activities, they can learn about their school responsibilities.

The stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and local government officials, should collaborate to ensure the success of Operation Baklas. They can support schools by providing resources for proper waste disposal, promoting overall cleanliness practices, and engaging in community discussions on responsible parenthood.

The future researchers can explore the long-term effects of Operation Baklas on environmental sustainability among learners. Studies on the effectiveness of educational campaigns, community involvement, and policy implementation can provide valuable insights for improving the initiative. Additionally, research on alternative teaching materials that are eco-friendly and sustainable can contribute to more responsible school practices.

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