



# EXPLICATING THE NARRATIVES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN HANDLING GRADE 2 STUDENTS WITHOUT PRIOR IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study employing the approach of narratology was to explore the narratives of elementary teachers in dealing with Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction in the Division of Tagum City. Three elementary teachers were selected through purposive sampling, and they were interviewed to glean the narratives relevant to the research topic of the study. Their narratives were similar which showed the problems that emerged among the Grade 2 learners after the pandemic which include the learning gaps in literacy and numeracy, socio-emotional problems of the pupils, and lack of parental involvement during the pandemic. In response to these perceived challenges, the teachers focused first on the recovery of the expected foundational skills of the learners and exposed them to lots of interactions with their peers. Moreover, remediation as an intervention was made available for the learners to cope with their learning gaps in consonance with asking the learners' parents for their collaboration and support. The elementary teachers realized that the curriculum should be adjusted to accommodate these learners who admittedly had learning loss during the pandemic. Support of teachers, educational leaders, parents, and stakeholders was perceived to be crucial to immediately address this serious problem in the society today.

**KEYWORDS:** education, elementary teachers, narrative research, purposive sampling, Division of Tagum City

## INTRODUCTION

The two-year academic interruption of students due to the COVID-19 pandemic has generated challenges among elementary teachers. Due to the fact that elementary schools had been closed for several years, educators could not interact with and instruct their students in person. In return, learners were also unable to receive rich and interactive in-person instruction from their teachers. This spelled tremendous gaps and disadvantages among the affected learners. What is more disadvantageous in this situation are the affected Grade 1 and Grade 2 pupils whose formative years must be spent in the schools so that they will be taught the basic numeracy and literacy skills which will serve as their foundation that they can use for the rest of their learning journey in life. This is the problem that I and my fellow Grade 2 teachers and pupils have been experiencing, now that face-to-face class has returned in full swing.

In China, second-grade students who had not received in-person instruction just before distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic exhibited a probable decline in academic performance, prompting elementary school educators to express challenges in managing these students. This was due to the classes held for both the end-of-year assessment and the internal examination, as well as the shortened interaction hours for students and the scarcity of

collaboration with teachers when confronting learning/understanding problems (Sintema, 2020). Moreover, in Thailand, Dorn et al. (2020) reported that there was an alarming learning gap among Grade 2 students who have not experienced prior in-person instruction giving their teachers a hard time in handling them.

Meanwhile, in the Philippine education sector, a number of research studies have identified how teachers struggle in handling students who do not have experience with in-person instruction. Research in the United States (Dorn et al., 2020) revealed that online learning is only about 52% efficient, and modular learning is even less efficient, at only about 37%. As a result of the observed learning deficits, when pupils returned to face-to-face classes, this issue became more common (Chua, 2022).

Furthermore, teachers in the locality of the Division of Tagum City reported how they struggled in dealing with the learning gaps among their Grade 2 students who do not have prior in-person instruction experiences, especially with their reading abilities. It has been observed that students' performances in the different subject areas have been detrimentally affected because of their poor comprehension of the lessons. Apparently, teachers attribute these poor performances to the learning gaps caused by their



ineffective modular learning from the previous school years. In fact, Arroyo et al. (2022) mentioned that remediation and other intervention programs were done by educators to improve the achievements of the students.

Seemingly, there have been few research studies conducted related to learning gaps among students without prior in-person instruction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These international studies include the study of Middleton (2020) about “The longer-term impact of COVID-19 on K–12 student learning and assessment”; the research of Rahm et al. (2021) about “Effects of realistic e-learning cases on students’ learning motivation during COVID-19”; and the study of Gore et al. (2021) on “The impact of COVID-19 on student learning in New South Wales primary schools: an empirical study”. These studies captured the realities of primary schoolers abroad who were affected by the transition in learning setup as a result of COVID-19 emergence. However, no studies have been conducted yet in the locality of Tagum City Division that focused on the experiences of elementary teachers in handling Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction. To fill this gap, I will conduct this qualitative research using the narratology approach to explore the educational problem faced by elementary teachers.

Apparently, this study implies a great sense of urgency as it would help reveal empirical and substantial information about the reality of learning gaps among Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic educational setup. It has the potential to further unveil both negative and positive experiences of teachers in dealing with such issues in the educational status of the learners. This study merits urgent attention because Grade 2 learners have lost a wealth of face-to-face learning and interaction opportunities to acquire foundational skills that are vital for their learning in the later stages.

Moreover, the results of this study would be disseminated through school-based activities such as Learning Action Cells, trainings, seminars, workshops, and the like. Teachers are the primary recipients of these pieces of information to be spearheaded by their master teachers. By doing so, teachers would be equipped with research-based data that can serve as their basis for action plans with programs and activities geared towards reversing the phenomena stipulated in this study.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narratological study was to explore the narratives of elementary teachers in dealing with Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction in the Division of Tagum City.

At this stage in research, the narratives of elementary teachers were generally defined as the narratives of the elementary teachers as they handle and deliver face-to-face instruction to Grade 2 pupils who did not receive any in-person instruction from any teacher in formal settings which was caused by the pandemic.

### Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of elementary teachers in handling Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction?
2. How did elementary teachers cope with the challenges encountered in handling Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction?
3. What are the insights drawn from the experiences of elementary teachers in handling Grade 2 students without prior in-person instruction that can be shared to others?

### METHODS

Employing the qualitative research design, this narrative approach of study aimed to highlight the stories of elementary teachers as they handled Grade 2 learners without in-person instruction in public schools in the Department of Education – Division of Davao del Norte. Narrative approach was utilized, in this case, as the lens of this study focused on Grade 2 teachers who experienced the phenomenon. Carless and Douglas (2017) opined that narrative inquiries depict the experiences of people through information-rich narratives and storylines. Using this approach, the purpose of this study was optimally achieved.

Three elementary teachers from Tagum City Division accepted gladly the invitation to become the participants of the study. In participant selection, purposive sampling was applied which is a type of sampling the judges and selects participants based on the richness of information that they can possibly give to answer the research inquiry (Campbell et al., 2020). As such, inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted in the careful participant recruitment. In selecting the participants, the following criteria were used: (1) they should be an elementary public-school teacher currently working in the Department of Education – Tagum City Division; (2) they should have at least three (3) years of experience as a Grade 2 adviser; and (3) they should be teaching Grade 2 pupils in this school year 2022-2023 who do not have experiences of prior in-person instruction. The exclusion criteria of the study specify that Grade 2 teachers coming from private schools were not included in this study.

In this endeavor, I embraced different roles to ensure the accomplishment of this scholarly work. These roles were: as someone who complied with the requirements for ethics review; as someone who conducted the in-depth interviews; as someone who recorded the interview; as someone who transcribed the participants’ response in the interviews; as someone who translated the responses to Standard English; as someone who conducted the member checking to verify the trustworthiness of the responses in the interviews; and as someone who conducted the analysis of the data.

Moreover, the sources of data were the audio recorded interviews with the three mentioned participants. A validated interview guide was utilized in the course of these interviews. Proper permissions and consent were secured beforehand to address confidentiality issues in the data collection procedures. In



addition, the transcripts of these interviews were subjected to thorough thematic analysis following the steps outlined by Boyatzis (1998). Once the analysis of data was finished, presentation of the results followed.

## RESULTS

### Summary of the Narratives of Teacher Apple

The first participant of this study is denoted with the pseudonym, Teacher Apple. She had four years of experience in teaching Grade 2 learners in one of the big elementary schools in the Department of Education - Division of Tagum City. When asked about her teaching views and philosophies, she believed that eclectic approach is the way to address the multifaceted needs of her learners. Above anything else, she also shared her passion in teaching her kids and she liked the fact when her students learn something new from her class.

After the pandemic, Ma'am Apple's life has turned upside down as she experienced struggles especially in managing her Grade 2 learners without prior in-person instruction. Learning gaps and lack of emotional readiness were the manifestations that the pandemic has greatly affected those kids under her care. She also recognized the lack of parental involvement in her children's education in the midst of pandemic, making the learning loss of her pupils further exacerbated.

Viewing these challenges, she devised means in order to reverse the effect of the pandemic. She fortified her relations with her parents to assist her in helping her students catch up to their expected skill and maturity at their current grade level. She also remediated the foundational skills of her learners in reading, writing, and arithmetic (3Rs). The social skills of her learners were also among her top priorities as full face-to-face classes have resumed.

In retrospection, Teacher Apple made many realizations on the stories she retold during the interview. Given that many of her pupils were highly at a disadvantage during and even after the pandemic, she realized that there is really a need to prioritize first the foundational skills of her learners and to extend one's efforts in doing so. Above all else, she remarked that it would be of the best interest of the basic education sector to be proactive and to rethink the necessary educative measures in every health crisis to make the entire country ready for the other pandemics to come.

### Summary of the Narratives of Teacher Strawberry

The second teacher who gladly accepted the invitation for an interview in this study is none other than Teacher Strawberry. She sported her five years of experience in teaching elementary learners and she was also proud to recently earn her master's degree in elementary teaching. When asked about her teaching views and philosophies, she believed that learners must be honed well in their foundational skills because this aspect greatly determines their future direction and leanings. She claimed that helping learners master their foundational skills at a young age

would greatly help them to be prepared for their life ahead, while those who did not would truly suffer at school and in life.

Evidently, she noticed a glaring gap between her Grade 2 learners' age and their expected level of maturity. This was complemented by the apparent literacy and numeracy struggles of those kids under her instruction. Knowing this, she extended individualized support to her pupils, especially those who have seriously been affected by school closures during the pandemic. She also recognized the critical role of intensified parental involvement, collaboration, and communication to enable the resolution of the learning gaps of pupils a success. Ultimately, she viewed resilience as a key aspect in ending this educational crisis among her elementary learners, and she also suggested that the curricular attention should be shifted to honing the pupils' foundational skills in the meantime.

### Summary of the Narratives of Teacher Tangerine

The third participant was Teacher Tangerine who qualified in the inclusion and exclusion criteria set in this study. Her rich 14 years of experience with the Department of Education (DepEd) as a permanent elementary school teacher was one of her amazing feats in life as a career woman. At the time of writing this paper, she was an elementary teacher teaching Grade 2 pupils in the wake of post-pandemic setting. As she navigated her way into teaching in this setting, she faced numerous challenges which made her journey a difficult one.

Her narrative takes a similar turn to that of the previous retold stories of Ma'am Apple and Ma'am Strawberry. Skill deficiencies in literacy and numeracy were highly evident, as per her statement. She also noticed the behavior of her learners as similar to those attending kindergarten education. As such, she believed that she had to trace back her teaching to the foundational skills of her pupils. In doing so, she had to match and localize her instruction to the actual identified needs of her pupils. She also had to be patient in leader her learners to knowledge and skill recovery.

As part of her reflection, Teacher Tangerine acknowledged that collaboration and support in these trying times are imperative. The government should be taking action and should see the issue of her Grade 2 and other elementary learners more seriously. With this in mind, she suggested that concerned government agencies should provide teachers with more resources and support in order to reverse the adverse effects of the pandemic to the formative education of her learners.

## CONCLUSIONS

Truly, this study reflected my personal experiences in the post-pandemic context. I was never oblivious to the stories that were shared by my participants with me, primarily because I also shared the same sentiments and accounts with all of them in terms of handling Grade 2 learners. Indeed, many learners were at a heavy disadvantage because the school closures hindered the majority of them from encountering enriching interaction and learning experiences which impeded their holistic development.



Pondering upon this fact, there is a mountain of responsibilities that Grade 2 teachers like myself must climb and overcome. Despite the poor conditions and serious aftereffects brought by the pandemic, there is still light for all other teachers, learners, parents, school administrators, and stakeholders once the pandemic subsides. Everyone may contribute to helping our elementary graders recover their learning losses from the unprecedented pandemic. The author hopes that the study will be put to good use, and it is hoped that the message of this study will spur changes that will benefit the basic education of the country.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It was realized after conducting this study that the problems of learning loss and social skills debilitation were never more serious than before. Even as early as Grade 2, problems with the foundational skills of the learners were already too apparent to ignore among the concerned authorities such as the primary school teachers, school administrators, and the department, in general. As such, the following recommendations for teaching practice are offered and addressed to these individuals and agencies to contribute to the resolution of this educational ordeal.

To the elementary teachers, the study only speaks of encouragement to sustain their passion, dedication, and patience to continuously teach elementary learners and help them catch up with the rest of the pupils through a series of remediation programs, social skill enhancement initiatives, and the use of innovative teaching strategies that are tailored to the learners' needs. Also, they are enjoined to involve further the parents in helping learners cope with their learning loss and social skill debilitation that they have acquired during the pandemic. They may ask for updates and seek parents' commitment to help learners be taught the foundational skills at home, while they do their job inside the confines of their classrooms.

For parents, their assistance is much needed today, given the gravity of the situation for their kids attending elementary education. They may seek assistance and guidance from the teachers on how to optimally assist their kids who are now lagging behind in terms of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

More so, school administrators and their teachers need them like never before. Their leadership is indeed essential today to propel the school toward addressing the learning gaps identified in the post-pandemic setting. Their support to the teachers in their teaching initiatives such as but not limited to personalized remediation programs and national learning camps is highly encouraged and appreciated and is instrumental in recovering from the serious learning gaps experienced by elementary pupils today.

For the DepEd officials, there is a need to identify the main focus of the future direction of our educational system. They are encouraged to support the teachers in their initiative to provide remediation and intensified instruction on the foundational skills

of learners, which are obviously inferior to their supposed grade level. They may support the teachers by enhancing the curriculum, shifting teacher focus on instruction for today, and giving them the necessary technical and material support to be empowered to help the learners deal with their experienced learning gaps.

Moreover, the study is still limited in view of the fact that it only focused on the aspect of handling Grade 2 learners who had no in-person instruction during the pandemic. With this in mind, future studies may view the research topic from another angle to affirm and even substantiate what was identified and presented here in the study. Future researchers may opt to use mixed-method approaches to gauge the extent of losses in foundational and social skills to derive a more in-depth description of the problem. Curricular innovations and adjustments may also be focused on by them to check whether these changes may help struggling learners resolve their learning gaps or not.

Classroom and instructional strategies may be explored by other scholars in terms of their efficacy through action research. Grade 2 teachers may take up the responsibility of ideating, devising, implementing, and assessing innovative teaching strategies that may help struggling learners catch up with others in terms of reading, writing, and arithmetic. More importantly, elementary teachers may take the helm in devising classroom strategies that may also incorporate the elements of cooperative learning and interaction to enable learners to overcome their emotional and social difficulties as a result of a couple of years of school closures.

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