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RESEARCH ARTICLE

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCIENCE TEACHERS OF PANGASINAN II IN THE NEW NORMAL EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges in the sector of Philippine education. The Department of Education Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) aims to ensure the continuity of learning; thus, Pangasinan Division II implemented the Printed Modular Distance Learning (MDL) for the school year 2020-2021. The primary objective of this study is to understand the lived experiences of Science Teachers of Pangasinan Division II in the new normal setting of education. Using phenomenology, this study explored the challenges in adapting the new learning modality, the implementation of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), the production, distribution, and retrieval of self-learning modules (SLMs), the implementation of the interim guidelines in the grading system in the new normal education and the priority developmental plans and needs of Science teachers. From the data gathered through interview and analysis of the documents among twenty (20) Science teachers, it revealed that emerging themes capped into the acronym "SURVIVORS" which unfolds the Science teachers' characteristics and experiences in the new face of education. The results showed that Science teachers are service-oriented, and the stakeholders showed unwavering support of stakeholders in the new learning modality. However, majority of the teachers exclaimed that distribution and retrieval of modules is the primary problem that arise from the different schools. Science teachers cope with these challenges through community partnerships and extending linkages that help them facilitate the distribution and retrieval of modules. In addition to that, Science teachers also acknowledged that printed modular learning should be shifted to blended learning as a modality in delivering education in the succeeding years. Integrating ICT through E-learning or online asynchronous learning could supplement the learner's competencies alongside with the printed modules. Also, Science teachers have common priority development needs in terms of functional and core competencies. Lastly, it is notable that Science teachers should always be flexible and adaptive in their roles of as facilitators of education.

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Introduction:-

The year 2020 brought unprecedented challenges and perennial problems to the different sectors throughout the world. Natural calamities, economic instabilities, political chaos are just a few of the dilemmas we are facing today. Prominently, a global health threat, the COVID-19, continuously cripples us to stand and recover from its deleterious impact on our economy. This virus outbreak has resulted in the adaptation of a new normal environment and drastically changed not only the lives of the people but as well as the face of education.

According to the United Nations (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic caused the largest and longest disruption of education systems in history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all continents. Similarly, the impact of this crisis has greatly affected the primary movers of education – the teachers.

Despite the many problems that the world is currently facing, quality education remains a top priority in the Philippines. The Department of Education (DepEd) works to uphold and encourage every Filipino's right to a quality education. However, with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, students' and teachers' health and welfare are in jeopardy. With this, the Department of Education (DepEd) supports various learning delivery modalities in order to continue the delivery of education while battling the country's current health crisis.

This proposition leads the Department of Education in establishing the adoption of the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) stipulated in the DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2020 which aims to ensure the continuity of learning but putting a priority on the welfare of the learners, teachers, and personnel of the country.

To deliver quality education amidst the pandemic, DepEd announces the adoption of different learning delivery modality whichever may possibly apply in the specific area or division. Learning will take place between the instructor and learners who are physically divided during teaching. Modular Distance Learning (MDL), Online Distance Learning (ODL), and TV/Radio-Based Teaching are the three forms of this modality.

Mailizar, et al. (2020) emphasized that using electronic learning (e-learning) as a means of continuing the teaching and learning process throughout the pandemic has been deemed the greatest option. Furthermore, Mukhtar (2020) recognized the benefits of remote learning, such as comfort and accessibility, while highlighting the drawbacks, such as inefficiency and the difficulties in preserving academic integrity, as a significant problem.

The Department of Education (DepEd) created and issued the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) which will serve as a guideline of the schools to safeguard the safety of all stakeholders. BE-LCP simplified the current curriculum and designate the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCS) which will be the emphasis of the upcoming school year. Students will be able to improve their 21st-century abilities, comprehend higher ideas, and relate courses into real-life situations as a result of this. Here, basic education teachers align the subjects to be addressed in MELCS while following to the set timetable and presenting an overview of the course. (DepEd, 2020)

To prepare the teachers in the new setting, the opening of this school year was moved from June to August and later to October 2020. Different webinars and LAC sessions were conducted to properly disseminate information in the delivery of instruction in the new normal setting. Also, this postponement gave time for teachers to prepare and to adapt to the distance remote learning in which the government strictly imposed until vaccines will be given to all teachers and students. Likewise, the Pangasinan II Division contextualized its own Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) and implemented a modular printed distance learning modality. Schools in the division were prompted to deliver the instruction in the remote area through the aid of Self Learning Modules aligned with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) which targets to decongest the curriculum.

In Pangasinan Division II, the learning delivery modality adopted is the Printed Modular Distance Learning (MDL) in the delivery of instruction for the school year 2020-2021. According to Malaya (2020), Modular Distance Learning features individualized instruction that allows learners to use self-learning modules (SLMs) in print or digital format/electronic copy, whichever applies to the learner. Learners under Modular Distance Learning can also use other resources such as Learner's Materials, textbooks, activity sheets, study guides, and other study materials. Most often the teachers will have to deliver the learning materials to the different households. Thus, learners will be distributed with the self-learning modules in which they can read and learn on their own pace with proper guidance of teachers thru the online platform whether in chat, call, text and others.

With the foregoing issues and concerns, the researchers explored the notable experiences of Science teachers in the implementation of learning delivery modality for the school year 2020-2021. The researchers aimed to determine the priority development needs and plans of Science teachers in the new normal education. Furthermore, the researchers believe that undertaking this study will provide research-based information that will help come up with the necessary plans and actions by the Department of Education that will strengthen Science teachers' knowledge and skills to cope with the new normal education.

Objectives Of The Study:-

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of Science Teachers of Pangasinan Division II in the new normal setting of education. In accordance, it aimed to achieve the following specific objectives:

1.) Identify the notable experiences of Science Teachers, specifically the challenges, adjustments, and their coping strategies in the new way of education along the learning delivery modality, implementation of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELC), production, distribution, and retrieval of self-learning modules (SLMs), grading system.

2.) Distinguish the priority development needs and plans of Science Teachers in the new normal education.

Methodology:-

This study employed the Phenomenology approach which allowed the researchers to learn how the participants made sense of their experiences. As defined by Creswell (2013), a Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Hence, using this type of research helped the researchers understand the lived experiences of Science teachers in the Junior High School (JHS) in the Modular Printed modality of learning.

The respondents of the study were twenty (20) Science teachers in Pangasinan Division II. Each respondent has been working in the Department of Education (DepEd) for 2-30 years, ranging in age from 24-55 years old, with specialization on the four major Sciences and teaching Junior High School (JHS) level.

A letter of permission was sought from the School Heads requesting the Science teachers to become the respondents of the study. Then, a letter of invitation was sent to the respondents bearing the objectives and nature of the inquiry. The details of the expectations from the respondents, the day and time of the interview were also stated in the letter. The respondents were scheduled strictly to adhere to the health protocols. Considering the direct participation of the respondents in the study, various ethical issues were considered during the data gathering stage. The principles of ethical behavior outlined by the American Counseling Association (2014) were applied which include autonomy, fidelity, commitment, trust, nonmaleficence, and veracity to protect the rights of the respondents. In addition, permission to record the interview was requested. Respondents were also told that they could discontinue their participation in the discussion if they find it uncomfortable.

For the sake of secrecy and anonymity, codes were utilized instead of names in the transcribing of results. Document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data. As a result, the researchers' task was to get access to the teachers' ideas and feelings without being influenced by subjectivity, prejudices, or personal preconceptions.

The interview was conducted in English, although participants could respond in either English or Filipino. Prior to coding, responses were collated and transcribed. Following that, a thorough study was carried out, which included detecting developing patterns, which might be expressed in phrases or words. According to Caulfield (2019), Thematic Approach is a way of examining qualitative data is thematic analysis. It is typically used to describe a group of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher studies the data carefully to find recurring themes - subjects, ideas, and patterns of meaning.

Results were presented as findings incorporating quotes from the teacher respondents in the context of their ideas and perspectives about the transition in new normal education which includes the new learning modality, implementation of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), production, distribution and retrieval of the self-learning modules (SLMs), grading system, and teachers' priority developmental plans and needs.

Results And Discussions:-

This study examined the lived experiences of the Science teachers of Pangasinan Division II regarding their challenges in adapting the new learning modality, implementation of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), production, distribution, and retrieval of self-learning modules (SLMs), and the interim guidelines in the grading system in the new normal education. Findings of this investigation identified emerging themes capped into **SURVIVORS** unfolding Science teachers' characteristics and experiences in the new face of education.

Notable Experiences of Science Teachers in the new way of education

Theme 1:

Service-oriented teachers and Unwavering support of stakeholders in the New Learning Modality

Twenty (20) Science teacher-respondents shared their experiences on the Printed modular instruction as implemented in their respective school for the school year 2020-2021. Teachers deliberately gave their insights on their everyday scenario as to what challenges they encountered and how they cope with these challenges. As mentioned in the interview conducted, Respondents 1,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12 correspondingly stated about their dilemma on the self-learning modules to be printed, sorted, and delivered in the particular area of their students.

As stated by a respondent,

"We are tired and have a hard time sorting the modules"(R1)

This clearly implies the tedious tasks of preparation and distribution of the modules. The overwhelming number of modules to be printed and distributed causes additional stress to the teachers aside from the vast number of reports required from them.

Another respondent shared that they have similar problem in the retrieval of modules. "Some students do not submit their outputs on the scheduled date (delayed submission)"(R4)

Moreover, another respondent also speaks up on the problem on insufficient production of learning resources: "We have encountered problems in the reproduction of modules. This problem led to the extension of the school year. Moreover, students are unable to have a consistent learning because of the late distribution of modules."(R8)

On the other hand, as to how to address these problems respondent 11 stated "Regarding the reproduction of modules, we teachers don't have any control to that matter. Instead, we make interventions especially with the special science class to have a continuous learning despite of the arising problems".

Schools were able to tie-up partnerships with the different stakeholders in their community for the procurement of additional equipment such as risograph machines, copiers, bond paper and inks. Science teachers continuously monitors their learners through "online kumustahan" and some of them intensified home visitations following the health protocols implemented in their area.

To lessen the intoxication of work and to continuously promote the safety and welfare of the teachers, Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA) has been strictly implemented in their workplace. Teachers are assigned in schedules following the skeleton workforce and work from home scheme.

Similar to the study of Ventayen (2018) that despite the teachers' inadequate experience in distance education, such as technical skills, time management, knowledge, and attitude in online education, DepEd teachers were nevertheless able to cope with the trends in remote learning.

In addition, the study conducted by Lansangan and Gonzales (2020) revealed that public School Science teachers are HOPEFUL (**H**ard-working and dedicated, **O**ptimistic amidst uncertainty; **P**roblematic yet reflective; **E**ven-handedness in responsibilities; **F**rightened but ready; **U**ndisruptive desire to reach; and **L**ife-long learner) which encapsulate their characteristics towards the demands of the new normal in teaching and learning. Robosa et. al, (2021) also claimed that teachers even in this time of pandemic are optimistic despite anxiety and exhaustion.

Theme 2:
Recalibration and Versatility in Implementation of Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs)

The Department of Education aims to address the pressing problem on the quality of Education based on the current low performing results in English, Science and Mathematics from the different international assessment organizations. The implementation of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) was intended to decongest the current curriculum prioritizing the most indispensable learning objectives in the specific area of discipline. Respondents were asked about their views in the implementation of most essential learning competencies in Science.

Most of the respondents perceived that lessening the number of required learning competencies in Science is very effective. As evidenced by the statement of a respondent, "The most essential learning competencies give us the idea on how we are going to design our lessons and activities based on the levels of learning. Yes, this is beneficial to decongest the curriculum."(R3)

However, the contents of the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs) given by the Department of Education conveyed some sort of misunderstanding among the respondents and perceived it as ambiguous. One respondent stated, "Still, congested. I think the set up (Distance Learning) was harder for the students to understand the required learning competencies in Science which comprised more on performance and laboratory skills"(R19)

Another challenge that Science teachers perceived is pedagogy. Considering the learning modality, respondents found the demands of the instructional preparation is exhausting to the teachers and learners. It could be a problem for teachers to deliver the different essential competencies set every week, especially in assessment of the performance skills of the students in a laboratory set up.

According to Boholano (2021) there is a need for the new normal pedagogies. Yorgancioglu (2020) stressed out the importance of new methodologies in teaching and learning process especially in our present situation. However, he suggested that the new pedagogies should be technologically driven same as Peters et al. (2020) refer it as digital pedagogies. The new normal in education required teachers to prepare and capacitate themselves to constantly provide quality education (Motala& Menon, 2020).

In addition, the topics in MELCs need to be unpacked into its specific objectives. In the eyes of the respondents, the new MELCs should focus on the competencies deemed important and essential amidst the pandemic. One respondent uttered, "I believe that our curriculum should focus on life skills to help prepare our students in life"(R15)

In terms of finding solutions to the pressing issues and problems, they suggested that Science teachers should be flexible and adaptive through developing contextualized learning materials that is suited to the learning needs of their students. Integrating basic life skills and Science ideas is a priority in the curriculum. Less complicated activities, real-life scenarios and multidisciplinary approaches should be considered in the teaching Science.

Teachers, as educational front liners, felt the impact on their instructional responsibilities. While everyone is experiencing uncertainty, educators' responsibilities are still tied to the consideration of equality, inclusion, and the significance of access for all students, according to the research Carisen, et al. (2020). This enormous difficulty in the educational context, as well as the reassuring of students and parents, is a critical component of institutional response, which includes exploring flexible strategies to restore the impact to student learning's trajectory.

Further, DepEd (2020) developed and released the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) that will serve as the guidebook of the schools to ensure the safety of all stakeholders of the school, upon starting the school year 2020-2021.

BE-LCP simplified the current curriculum and designated the MELCS, which will be the emphasis of the upcoming school year. Students will be able to improve their 21st-century abilities, comprehend higher ideas, and relate courses into real-life situations as a result of this. Teachers of basic education align the subjects to be covered in MELCS in accordance with its allocated timetable and provide an outline of what topics to teach in this section.

As a result, the teachers are challenged to be more innovative in delivering the lesson for the students to master the lesson objectives.

Theme 3:
Innovation and Vitality in Production, Distribution, and Retrieval of Self-Learning Modules (SLMs)

Self-Learning Modules (SLM) as the main tool of delivering instructions in the Pangasinan Division II went through a rigorous process. Far from the start of the school year, Science teachers are tapped and challenged to develop learning resources such contextualized modules and activity worksheets. From writing the paper, to checking and validation, to reproduction, until distribution and retrieval of modules, teachers are in the frontline.

The respondents were also asked on the challenges they encountered during the whole year of implementation of the Printed Modular Instruction. Majority of the teachers exclaimed the problems that arise in their respected school are mainly in the distribution and retrieval of modules. The teachers were tasked to deliver the modules in the area of their students. Most of the teachers need to transport the bulk of modules for the students to answer.

"We have experienced shortage of resource materials such as bond papers and malfunctioning of photocopy machines, we also encountered problems in the distribution and retrieval like the unavailability of vehicles for delivery of the SLMs."(R12)

Ross-Hain (2020) found out that distance learning compelled teachers to modify their course content due to an imposed time limitation, delivery method, and desire not to overwhelm students. These adaptations impacted academic continuity, as well as the assessment of student learning. Moreover, Robosa, et. al, (2021) revealed that most teachers are significantly challenged by lack of resources, handling of students, and the submission and workloads that contribute to stress and burnout.

Teachers also revealed that some parents passively participate in the distribution and retrieval of modules since majority of them are working, thus they need to prioritize their means of living. However, teachers continuously reminded these parents about their role in the new normal education. Schools were also extending and rescheduling the time for the availability of parents to fetch the modules for their children.

Robosa et. al (2021) highlighted in his study that public school teachers cope with these challenges though continuous communication and extending consideration in the parents' circumstances.

Moreover, teachers empowered the spirit of Bayanihan and home visitation. Community partnerships, tie-ups and linkages helped teachers to facilitate the distribution and retrieval of modules.

Theme 4:
Providing Opportunity and Responsive evaluation in the Grading system

Teachers have the critical role in monitoring the progress and development of learners. Assessment in the new normal as perceived by Science teachers are different from one another.

Respondent 3 stated, "DepEd Order No. 31 s. 2020 will effectively assess the students' competencies as it considers holistic and authentic assessment, diversified assessment strategies, and from the results obtained from the assessment, a feedback to the teachers, learners and their families will be given." On the other hand, Respondent 15 alleged that "I am not in favor to this guideline for assessing and grading our leaners. It will not effectively assess our student's competencies through this kind of learning modality. We do not know if we could measure really the intelligence of a child since we do not teach them on a face to face".

Science teachers thought that assessment should be holistic and should always be fair and just for the learners. Providing variety of assessment tools and considering the multiple intelligence of learners should be kept into consideration. Integrating technology such as the use of google classroom and google quiz can be a great help in providing an immediate feedback of the student's performance. Utilizing rubrics can also be effective to evaluate students' performance outputs. Portfolio of students is also a reliable means of assessing students' progress in the class.

However, one respondent also claimed that using a Pass and Fail Mark can also be an alternative in this learning modality, because using numerical rating is impractical to assess whether the competencies are attained or not.

Similarly, the study of Cahapay (2020) suggested that when evaluating learner's performance in the new normal, schools should change the ways they use assessment scales from quantitative to qualitative, for example a pass or fail system. Teachers and students in the new normal in education are already burdened to attain all curriculum requirements (Aliyyah et al., 2020). In addition, Gonzales (2020) stated that assessments and grading systems should be re-examined in conjunction with the pedagogical methodologies.

Theme 5:
Strengthening the Priority Development Needs and Plans of Science Teachers

The Department of Education (DepEd) is committed to provide the members of its organization the opportunities to grow professionally, as well as to foster active participation and commitment in the organization.

To execute this philosophy, the Department of Education uses a Results-Based Performance Management System. It is a collaborative effort between the superior and the employee that allows for an open dialogue about employment expectations, KRAs, and objectives. It provides a forum for the organization's performance and conduct standards to be agreed upon, resulting in professional and personal improvement.

As a part of understanding the priority development needs and plans of Science teachers in Pangasinan Division II, the researchers conduct an analysis on their Individual Performance Commitment Review Form (IPCRF) Development Plans for the School Year 2020-2021. In this document, teachers identify the area for development needs through a self-assessment tool. The teacher's strengths are highlighted and recognized as well as their developmental needs and their planned interventions.

Upon thoroughly evaluating the documents, it can be summarized that Science teachers have common priority developmental needs along the functional and core behavioral competencies. They were able to identify that setting achievable and appropriate learning outcomes that are aligned with learning competencies is a topmost priority. Moreover, selecting, developing, organizing, and using appropriate teaching and learning resources, integrating ICT to address learning goals is greatly desired among the Science teachers in this time of new normal in education. On the other hand, innovation and result focus gained the highest importance under the core behavioral competencies. Innovation is imperative to education. It entails fostering new ideas, processes and suggest better ways to do things.

During the interview, respondents firmly believe that learning modality should be adapted to the needs of the learners, one participant stated,

"We should plan and deliver teaching strategies that are responsive to the educational needs of learners in difficult circumstances.(R8)

Science teachers also acknowledged that printed modular learning should be blended in other modalities. Integrating ICT through E-learning or online asynchronous learning could supplement the learner's competencies alongside with the printed modules given to them. Contextualized modules, video lessons and strategic interventions materials and other appropriate learning resources can augment the learning gaps among the students. Continuous monitoring and feedback play a significant role in the teaching and learning process.

Online learning, as a new modality, includes the use of technology and associated obstacles, such as (a) Internet connection, (b) teacher training, (c) parent supervision, (d) hands-on sessions, and (e) system preparation, Despite the availability of pedagogies, the stakeholders reacted to a request for online learning. As a result, educators must rethink and retool themselves for the future, ensuring that online lessons are done comprehensively, creatively, and with a personal touch. (Gonzales, 2020)

The study of Arrieta and Agbisit (2020) perceived the effectiveness of teaching methodologies like learner-centered approach, inquiry-based learning, and feed backing. Learning resources can be improved by utilizing new online platforms and applications, creating vlogs, and better multimedia presentations.

As a result, one of the most essential talents that instructors must have in this pandemic circumstance is the ability to use technology. Without this ability, it is unthinkable that individuals will be able to live in these extraordinary circumstances. Teachers that incorporate technology into their classrooms see an increase in student accomplishment, as well as motivated and critical thinkers. (Saglam&Sert, 2012; Chang, 2012).

Science teachers also recognize the impact of parents' participation. Parents considered as the teachers at home need to be equipped on how they will effectively assist their children at home. Volunteer teachers are also encouraged in the community. As one participant emphasized: "It takes the concerted efforts of the community to educate a child in this time of fears and doubts."(R12)

Without equitable participation from teachers, parents, and students, the Philippines' new normal education would be jeopardized. Without the involvement of parents, instructors and students may not be able to provide a high-quality education. Everyone must have a role to play and be aware of it. The major aims of parents are to keep an eye on, motivate, and lead their children, even in small ways. It is increasingly regarded a must-have for parents to provide their children with more opportunity to investigate things on their own in their "class-home." (2020, Arias)

In conclusion, the respondents unanimously stated that they had been creating strategic interventions and supplementary materials and means to effectively deliver quality education amidst the pandemic.

Conclusions:-

These are the following conclusions collated and validated from the interview and documents retrieved from the respondents:

1. Science teachers are service-oriented, and the stakeholders showed unwavering support in the new learning modality.
2. Science teachers encountered problems in printing, sorting, distribution and retrieval of modules.
3. Most Essential Learning Competencies should focus on the competencies deemed important and essential in consideration of our pandemic situations.
4. Majority of the teachers exclaimed the problems that arise in their respected school roots from their distribution and retrieval of modules.
5. Community partnerships, tie-ups and linkages help teachers to facilitate the distribution and retrieval of modules.
6. Provide opportunity in assessing the progress of students. There is a need of responsive and holistic assessment in the new learning modality.
7. Science teachers have common priority developmental needs in terms of functional and core competencies; and
8. Science teachers acknowledged that printed modular learning should be blended into other modalities.

Recommendations:-

Based on the findings, the researchers recommend the following to further enhance and supplement the study:

1. Explore the teachers' actual experiences during the new mode of teaching and account for factors that impede its implementations in terms of personal, pedagogical and professional inquiries.
2. Determine the impact of the New Normal teaching to the learning experiences of the students during the pandemic.
3. Compare the experiences of teachers from different learning areas with regards to their challenges in adapting the new normal education.
4. Evaluate the parents lived experiences in their role of in new normal education; and
5. Conduct a quantitative study that explores the readiness of teachers, parents, and learners in flexible learning modalities.

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