

THE MINDSET OF TEACHERS IN PURSUING GRADUATE EDUCATION: A GROUNDED THEORY

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ABSTRACT:

Education is a lifelong process. This is a reality of today's highly competitive world of teaching where you need to update your knowledge and skills every now and then. For this reason, this study focused on developing a theory on the mindset of teachers on pursuing graduate education. It also examined the views and perspectives of teachers if graduate education enhanced their knowledge and application to teaching. This also explored teacher experiences, motivation, attitudes and opinions towards continuing professional development. This qualitative study used unstructured interview and followed a Glasserian approach (1978), to guide the collecting and coding of interview data in order to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory. The data were coded and analyzed guided by the research problem, "teachers mindset in pursuing graduate education". The informants of this study were the teachers of Balamban Districts who pursued graduate studies. Results showed that teachers pursue graduate education to enhance their teaching competence, elevate teaching position and for greater self-confidence and self-fulfillment which resulted to improved working environment and increased student achievement. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should attend graduate studies to continue their journey for professional learning and development.

KEYWORDS: graduate education, growth mindset, mindset, professional development, teacher experiences, Balamban Districts, Department of Education

I. INTRODUCTION

"The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers." (McKinsey, 2007)

Teachers play a crucial role in nation building. Through quality teachers, the Philippines can develop holistic learners who are steeped in values, equipped with 21st century skills, and able to propel the country to development and progress. Thus, it is imperative that teachers will consider continuing education especially pursuing graduate teacher education as a reflection of their high commitments to their profession. From teachers' perspectives, there are many advantages for pursuing graduate teacher education program such as developing new teaching skills, widening knowledge base, uplifting self-confidence, translating current educational research into practices, and improving job security with better remuneration. Evidences show unequivocally that good teachers are vital to raising student achievement. Thus, quality learning is contingent upon quality teaching. Hence, enhancing teacher quality becomes of utmost importance for long-term and sustainable nation building. The changes brought about by various national and global frameworks such as the K to 12 Reform and the ASEAN integration, globalization, and the changing character of the 21st century learners necessitate improvement and adaptability of education, and a call for the rethinking of the current teacher standards.

The purpose of education as a means to improve student learning and achievement is at the forefront of the past and current educational reform initiatives. However, the success of such reform initiatives largely depends on teachers' competency and teaching practices, which has direct impact on students learning outcomes. Teachers' methods and strategies are the determining factors in the effectivity and efficiency of the teaching deliverables in the classroom. Therefore, concerns related to improving teachers' performance through continuing education came into force with the advent of the educational reform movements. Likewise, the Department of Education have introduced LAC sessions to support the continuing professional development of its teaching personnel based on the principle of lifelong learning and DepEd's commitment to the development of teachers' potential.

The mindset of the teachers towards graduate education is essential as this influences their interest in pursuing graduate studies. According to Dweck (2006), the mindset is a self-perception or "self-theory" which people embrace. People with a growth mindset (also called incremental theory) believe that intelligence, personality, and abilities can be developed. People with a fixed mindset (also called entity theory) believe that these basic qualities are static and unalterable. People have general tendencies toward one mindset or the other, but it is also common to have different mindsets in various domains of the self and others (e.g., intelligence, personality, giftedness)

(Kuusisto, Laine, & Tirri, 2017; Molden & Dweck, 2006). Teachers with different mindsets have different beliefs and concern about different aspects in their profession.

It is now a common fact that teachers need to pursue graduate education considering its importance as one of the basis for promotion and impact to teaching. Promotion and step increments are dependent on point system where teachers accumulate points by participating in training, publishing articles and post graduate education. However, the researcher has observed that not all continued their graduate studies. In the school where she is currently assigned, nobody is a master's degree holder. Out of 31 teachers, only 7 have completed their academic requirements leading to their Master's degree. Though the management of the Department of Education has been encouraging its teachers to upgrade themselves and even granted leave with pay to those who are already writing their thesis and dissertations, some teachers are still hesitant to venture for professional development. Despite all these, only a few teachers have the courage and perseverance of finishing master's degree and doctorate degree. Hence, the conduct of the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's world, it is not enough to just earn a bachelor's degree and expect to make a real difference in the lives of the students. There is a need for constant upgrading and upskilling of one's self if we want to achieve the best quality of education. As the saying goes, you cannot give what you do not have. For many teachers, making this difference through hard work and dedication would give a satisfaction and indeed, a true benefit of teaching. Researchers constantly discover new ways of integrating academic theory and teaching by gaining new skills that would best impact their students. Teachers who earn their advanced degrees show a deep level of understanding and commitment to their profession, allowing them to modify curriculum goals, adjust teaching methods and enter leadership positions to enact the system-wide changes in education they wish to see.

Making teachers more prepared, equipped, and competent through continuing teacher education is probably the most promising approach to address current and future educational challenges. However, there are significant disagreements about how teachers should acquire new knowledge or hone skills, and why some strategies are more effective than others (Hammerness et al., 2005). This would also be dependent with the reflection of a teacher on the possibilities of the occurrence of such problems. With the current issues and overlapping policies presented, it is undeniably true that efficiency of the teachers is being challenged.

Many school districts and states have long encouraged teachers to pursue graduate education. Teachers are frequently permitted to use graduate credits for recertification (Hill, 2007), and teachers with graduate degrees generally earn a higher salary or receive an annual stipend (Miller & Roza, 2012). Moreover, in some cases a master's degree is a requirement for teacher licensure. According to the 2015 data from the National Council on Teacher Quality, four states required a master's degree or its equivalent in coursework for professional licensure (Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, and New York), and four other states recommend a master's degree as a route to professional licensure (Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, and Oregon). A master's degree is also universally required for teacher licensure in thirteen countries, such as France, Spain, and Finland (World Policy Analysis Center, 2016). Advocates have argued that graduate education may improve teacher effectiveness (Harris & Sass, 2011) and raise the status of the teaching profession (Sahlberg, 2015).

Towards this end, the DepEd fully supports the continuing professional development of its teaching personnel based on the principle of lifelong learning and the view of the teaching profession as one that "requires teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study" (UNESCO 1966). The DepEd also recognizes that the quality of learning is greatly influenced by the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is imperative for the DepEd to hire good teachers and to support their development in the teaching profession. Organizing professional learning communities will aid teachers in the construction of new knowledge about instruction as well as in revising traditional beliefs and assumptions about education, community, teaching, and learning (Little 2003) to suit the present needs of learners. Schools are instructed to form professional learning communities where teachers can share their best practices in teaching as well as help those who are having problems in their teaching practice. In other words, this would be an avenue for the school to collaborate and solve issues concerning the not only to instruction but also to the overall aspects of the school system.

The Philippine Government has consistently pursued teacher quality reforms through a number of initiatives. As a framework of teacher quality, the National Competency-Based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) was institutionalized through CHED Memorandum Order No. 52, s. 2007 and DepED Order No. 32, s. 2009. It emerged as part of the implementation of the Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda (BESRA), and was facilitated by drawing on the learning considerations of programs, such as the Basic Education Assistance for Mindanao (BEAM), the Strengthening Implementation of Visayas Education (STRIVE) project and the Third Elementary Education

Project (TEEP). The K to 12 Reform (R.A. 10533) in 2013 has changed the landscape of teacher quality requirements in the Philippines. The reform process warrants an equivalent supportive focus on teacher quality – high quality teachers who are properly equipped and prepared to assume the roles and functions of a 21st century teacher. Thus the introduction of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers.

Secondary Education Development and Improvement Project (SEDIP) as well as empirical studies on similar professional development programs that demonstrate that teachers' participation in professional development activities have a positive impact on teachers' beliefs and practices, students' learning, and the implementation of educational reforms (UNESCO ISO 2006). Successful teaching is a result of the systematic use of appropriate strategies for delivering and assessing the learning objectives targeted for each lesson (UNESCO GMR 2014). Successful teachers possess a good grasp of content which they can consequently convert to sound learning objectives, are able to select and implement the most effective instructional strategies and materials to teach the identified content objectives, make instructional decisions on the basis of formative assessment results, promote sincerely their students' learning and holistic development, and are professional and ethical in the conduct of their work (Stronge 2007).

Different methods of teacher professional development are implemented throughout the DepEd to improve teaching-learning processes. However, most of these are top-down processes wherein expert knowledge is shared or transferred. Examples of these are lectures or workshops during cascaded or echoed teacher training and short-term courses. Other top-down training programs are done over time such as scholarships, and distance learning programs. Though existing in some schools or divisions in the DepEd, there are fewer instances of bottom-up teacher professional development programs where colleagues study content and pedagogies together, plan lessons collaboratively, and conduct action research as a group. Examples of these are school-based learning action cells, teaching circles, communities of practice, and lesson study.

In addition to this demand of producing high quality teachers, there is another trend of emphasizing teachers' accountability by linking teacher professional development with students' learning outcomes. Teachers' effectiveness has become a concerning issue in the face of meeting challenges of a contemporary society, as are rapid socio-economic changes and technological progresses (Hallinan & Khmelkov, 2001). These new demands impose teachers to adopt new learning approaches to convey materials in a productive and effective way. Therefore, engaging in-service teachers in continuous professional training is needed to keep them informed about contemporary teaching theories and practices.

In the intervention study by Schmidt et al. (2015), two teachers were observed who had been identified as holding a growth mindset on the basis of Dweck's scale (2000, 2006). Only one of them actualized a growth mindset pedagogy in practice – and only this teacher's students had long-lasting benefits from the mindset intervention in which they had participated. Park, Tsukyama, Gunderson, Levine, and Beilock (2016) conducted a study in which they explored first- and second-grade students' motivational frameworks and mathematics achievements, and found that these were connected to teacher-reported mastery-oriented atmospheres in the classroom, but not very much to the teachers' mindsets. While the reliability of evaluating individual teachers' mindsets on the basis of the mindset scale can be questioned, the results of these studies point up the continuing need for finely nuanced qualitative studies that identify the implications of teachers' implicit belief systems for their pedagogical practices.

Past research has indicated that the effects of having a master's degree (relative to only a bachelor's degree) on student achievement partly vary by the level of schooling and academic subject (Goldhaber, 2015) as well as the congruence between the major field of study and the teacher's classroom subject matter (Hill, 2007).¹ Researchers have examined teacher effectiveness in early childhood and primary schools, middle and junior high schools, and high schools.

According to "Master's Degrees and Teacher Effectiveness: New Evidence From State Assessments," conducted by Arroyo Research Services, teachers who earn master's degrees demonstrate greater teaching effectiveness than those who don't. The study found that student whose teachers held a master's degree performed better in reading and writing tests. Researchers examined over 4,000 teachers and 205,000 students, discovering that knowledge gained in a master's program does, in fact, lead to improved student outcomes. Similarly, master's programs stress the importance of individual learning and assessment, allowing a teacher to become more fluid in his or her teaching practices. For instance, one teacher interviewed by Masters-Education.com noted that earning a master's in curriculum, instruction and assessment completely altered his mindset on teaching.

Good educational systems ensure that opportunities for both approaches to professional development programs are available and accessible to teachers (Whitehouse 2011). It is therefore incumbent upon the DepEd to ensure teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) within the framework of School-Based Management (SBM) and embodied in the School Improvement Plans (SIPs). As such, this policy highlights the fact that the locus of

learner development is at the school where deliberate measures must be taken to improve student learning outcomes. According to Education Secretary Leonor Briones, the most crucial challenge is with our teachers. “With fast-changing standards of education quality, the teachers must be able to constantly keep up with the times.” Focusing on teachers, Briones said, is as crucial as reviewing the curriculum and addressing gaps in education resources. The battle for quality basic education will be fought and won inside the classroom, by the teachers.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this research is to develop a theory on the mindset of teachers in pursuing graduate education. More specifically, it aims to examine the views and perspective of the teachers if attending graduate studies had a positive impact on them as professionals, enhance their teaching practice and the working environment. It also investigates the effectiveness of continuing professional education to improve student performance. Finally, it explores teachers’ initial experiences, motivation, attitudes and opinions towards the pursuance of graduate education.

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN AND FRAMEWORK

The Grounded theory using Glasserian approach (1978), a qualitative research methodology was utilized to investigate the phenomena of interest in this preliminary study to generate the theory on the mindset of teachers in pursuing graduate education. (Abadiano, 2016)

Theory Generating – Inductive Method

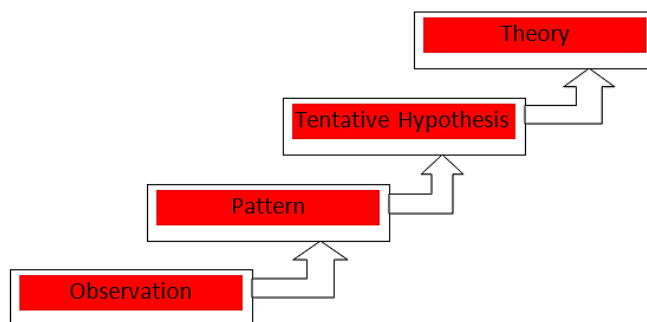


Figure 1. The Theory Generation Process of Inductive Method

Research Environment. The study was conducted in Balamban District 1 and 2, Division of Cebu Province. The districts are located in the Northwest area of Cebu headed by District Supervisors. Each district has more or less 20 schools with 200 teachers.

Research Participants/Informants. The researcher used purposive sampling. The researcher, tapped twelve (12) teachers of Balamban 1 and 2. Selection Criteria were as follows: a.) a regular permanent teacher and b.) has pursued graduate studies.

Research Instruments. The study instrument consisted of interview questions. The participants are asked about their views regarding attending graduate studies and the impact of continuing professional education to their profession, student performance and working environment.

Data Gathering. Since, it was unsafe to conduct face to face interview because the Municipality of Balamban was under Enhanced Community Quarantine due to Covid 19 pandemic, the researcher conducted an online interview with the twelve (12) teachers of Balamban 1 and 2 who have pursued graduate education. The participants were informed about the study and consents were polled for their participation.

Data Analysis. A thematic approach was used by the researcher, in which the researcher based the themes generated according to the results of the interview of the respondents. Based on the answers of the participants to the interview guide, the researcher was guided to develop different themes.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Themes

Grounded Theory research method which operates almost in a reverse fashion from traditional social science research. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the first step is data collection, through a variety of methods. From the data collected, the key points are marked with a series of codes, which are extracted from the text. The

codes are grouped into similar concepts in order to make them more workable. From these concepts, categories or themes are formed, which are the basis for the creation of a theory (Allan, 2003).

Theme 1 Enhanced teaching competence

“I gain more knowledge on how to improve my teaching performance.”

“I improved my knowledge and skills in teaching.”

“I gain advanced skills and in-depth knowledge of my subject area.”

“My graduate studies have refreshed my knowledge and skills since I graduated a long time ago at CNU at the same time I am now updated with the innovations in teaching.”

“Being in the graduate school provided me with hands-on learning experiences.. That specific knowledge increases my proficiency in different disciplines.”

Theme 2 Improved working environment

“ I learned how to deal with my fellow teachers that is why we have better working relationship.”

“I can understand their feelings and emotions because I learned that we have different abilities and capacities in my philosophy class.”

“ I am ready to assist my fellow teachers if ever they have problems or questions in how to teach a particular topic.”

Theme 3 Increased student achievement

“As I learned the different strategies in teaching, I am very excited in how to find creative ways in teaching that would result to high performance.”

“ I am encouraged to make and prepare more engaging activities that will improve their performance”

“Because of my knowledge and skills I imparted to my pupils, my learners were able to learn in a more in-depth process hence progress in academics”

“As a Graduate student at the same time a SHS teacher, I can impart to my students the new trends and strategies in making a research paper for them to make better reasearches.”

Theme 4 Elevated Teaching Position

“Aside from gaining knowledge, I have also a dream of being promoted. Thanks God, I was promoted to Master Teacher I last February 2020.”

“I am looking forward of elevating my teaching position. I am now a Master Teacher II and my salary has increased.”

“I was promoted to Master Teacher II and of course I have improved my financial aspects”

“My graduate education has significant impact in my profession in terms of career change and advancement. I was promoted as a school head with a designation of Teacher in Charge.”

“ It will improve my career paths and I can apply for a better position with a high salary and have best opportunities where I can fit in.”

Theme 5. Greater self-confidence and self-fulfillment

“The positive impact on me in terms of credibility and expertise as a teacher gave me a greater sense of confidence and self-fulfillment”

“The level of my confidence has improved because I am trained to face a big audience. I have no more fear in facing prominent people because I have a degree and they cannot underestimate my ability.

“I am more confident now because I am always sent to attend seminars. I felt so good and fulfilled when my superior chose me to be a resource speaker out of almost a hundred teachers.

“My confidence and credibility is increased. It is so fulfilling and satisfying when my fellow teachers asked me something about research and they will listen intently and follow my suggestions and recommendations. I can say that the highest need which is self-actualization is being met.”

Hypotheses and Propositions To generate a substantive theory, sub-categories and theoretical categories of experiences of teachers who pursued graduate education were considered. Hypotheses were generated to explore the mindset, motivation of teachers to further their studies. These hypotheses were derived from the empirical data from the framed questions appropriate to the study. One main interview question and follow up guide questions were asked to generate hypothesis, which were described below.

Hypothesis 1 Attending graduate classes will gradually enhance your knowledge and skills in teaching because you will learn new pedagogies and the latest trends in teaching.

Proposition 1 Graduate studies affects the teaching competence.

Hypothesis 2 Teachers openness and collaborative effort lead to a happy and relaxed working environment. .

Proposition 2 Readiness to share knowledge and accept each other’s strengths and weaknesses improve the working relationship among teachers.

Hypothesis 3 The acquired knowledge and the commitment to apply the knowledge learned lead to the improvement of student outcomes.

Proposition 3 The commitment and dedication to teaching resulted to Increased student achievement

Hypothesis 4 If you have a master’s or doctorate degree, you have a higher promotional rate

Proposition 4 Promotion or career advancement largely depends on one’s educational qualification.

Hypothesis 5 Being equipped with the knowledge and skills improves the self-confidence and vanish the fear of facing a large audience.

Proposition 5 Confidence and credibility lead to self fulfillment and satisfaction.

VI. THEORY

Teachers pursue graduate education to enhance their teaching competence, elevate teaching position and for greater self-confidence and self-fulfillment which will result to improved working environment, and increased student achievement.

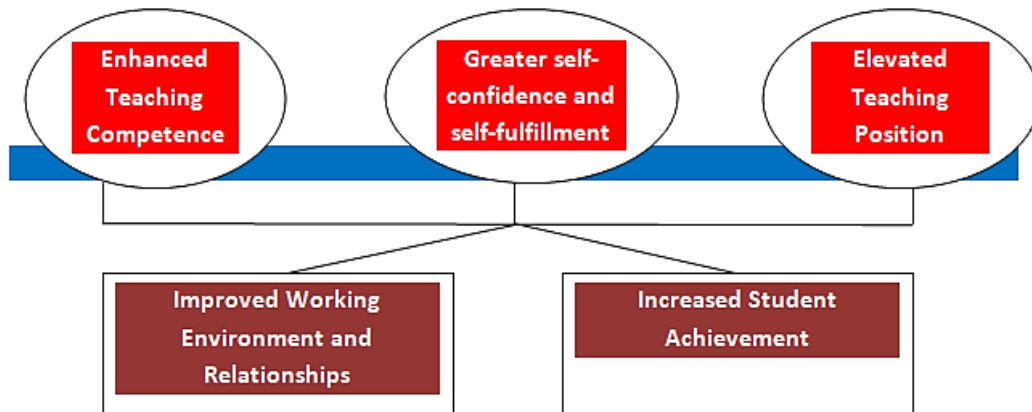


Figure 2. Theory on the Mindset of Teachers in Pursuing Graduate Education

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