

Lived Experiences of Teachers Handling Bajao Learners in the Context of Blended Learning: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract

This study investigates teachers' perspectives on handling Bajao learners in the context of blended learning. Phenomenological qualitative research using interviews with seven (7) faculty members from Sta. Ana District, Davao City Division, was undertaken in order to contribute teachers' voices dealing with indigenous learners while implementing distance education. In-person interviews were conducted, audiotaped, transcribed, and evaluated for recurring themes. Member checks and peer reviews were used to verify the data. Several themes emerged from the teachers' experiences with Bajao learners. Most participants shared their perspectives on the struggles of Bajao learners. Many expressed that Bajao learners and their families were reluctant to report symptoms for fear of financial and physical health consequences. Access to digital resources was a major issue for staying on track with distance learning. Many were unable to afford or have access to their daily necessities. Family financial strain, agitation, a poor learning environment, and behavioral fatigue posed challenges for teachers. Teachers must adopt certain strategies, such as (a) alternative student assessment delivery, (b) encouraging parental support through communication and a positive approach, and (c) outsourcing and the use of personal funds to meet needs. Participants reflected on teaching ideals and expressed their preference for face-to-face delivery. The review of blended learning delivery and the enhancement of programs aimed at improving Bajao's quality of life were also observed. Therefore, we recommend that public and private institutions collaborate to create culture-based instruction for Bajao learners.

Keywords: lived experiences, blended learning, Bajao learners, phenomenological approach



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INTRODUCTION

The education of indigenous peoples, especially the Bajao community, represents a major connection of cultural preservation, social justice, and human rights. As one of the most marginalized indigenous communities in the Philippines, the Bajao encounter numerous problems in obtaining a quality education. Poverty and economic disadvantage worsen the Bajao people's educational hardships. Limited access to basic utilities like clean water, power, and healthcare has a direct impact on educational attainment, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and exclusion. Furthermore, prejudices based on cultural stereotypes and misconceptions can have an impact on the quality of schooling and overall educational experiences for Bajao people.

As institutions explore new standard teaching modalities, academic interest in implications for education and indigenous communities increases. Currently, the educational gap

between the less fortunate children and those from wealthier and more technologically advanced regions is escalating. Equal access to education is a basic demand, particularly for those living in underprivileged communities, like the Bajao people (Baloran, 2020).

Moreover, indigenous, and traditional groups want access to existing cultural resources for reconstruction and new meaning. Indigenous peoples and traditional communities are becoming increasingly interested in directly participating in the recording, presentation, and representation of their own traditions in public. They also want to own, control, and access cultural heritage resources stored in cultural institutions. This increased interest in self-representation and cultural ownership mirrors a larger global move towards indigenous rights. By reclaiming control over their cultural legacy, indigenous and traditional communities hope to challenge mainstream narratives, retain their unique identities, and ensure the continuous

transfer of knowledge and practices to future generations (Anderson, 2010).

The above articulations posit the idea that there is a need to address the lived experiences of elementary teachers on their instructional delivery handling Bajao learners utilizing the blended learning modality. This led the researcher to examine the experiences, coping strategies, and learning insights of the teachers handling Bajao learners. Specific objectives of the study are the following: a) to unearth the experiences of teachers handling Bajao learners in the delivery of blended learning modality; b) to unearth the coping strategies of teachers in overcoming the challenges they have encountered; and c) to unearth the learning insights generated by the teachers in relation to their instructional delivery in handling Bajao learners utilizing the blended learning modality.

This study holds significant importance as it equips city government, school administrators, and teachers with the necessary insights to develop targeted intervention programs tailored to the needs of Bajao learners. By focusing on livelihood training, value formation, and education, these interventions lay the groundwork for comprehensive school programs, projects, and activities that address the unique challenges faced by Bajao children. The findings of the study ensure that Bajao learners are better understood, enabling the creation of educational initiatives that enhance their learning experience and overall quality of education. Consequently, the study's outcomes are pivotal in fostering an inclusive educational environment that supports the holistic development of Bajao children, ultimately contributing to their academic success and personal growth.

LITERATURES

The literature investigated Philippine indigenous peoples' origins and traits. Previous studies describe Bajao culture and education. After the pandemic, blended learning became the norm, according to the literature. Blended learning helps students who cannot use face-

to-face instruction, which is provided to all. Thus, multiple instructor experiences with indigenous learners were selected from various sources in regard to blended learning, a form of remote education.

Experiences of Teachers. The Philippine Department of Education has launched the National Indigenous Peoples Education Program in response to every indigenous person's (IP) right to a basic education that is sensitive to their identities, context, skills, cultural heritage, and values (D.O. 22, 2016). In general, indigenous children have not received education of a comparable quality. Teachers haven't always been given the resources they need to help IP students advance their talents and skills, nor have they always been adequately prepared to teach them (OECD, 2017). Despite their enthusiasm and dedication, teachers may not fully comprehend application instructions or the complexity of indigenous knowledge, cultures, and identities (Santoro & Reid, 2011).

As a result, teachers' methods of instruction for non-indigenous students could not work well or efficiently for pupils who identify as IP. When it comes to educating indigenous pupils, numerous schools have fallen short. Wa-Mbaleka (2013) lists a number of factors as causes, including teachers' lack of contextualization, links, and integration of cultural values in the classroom; also, they lack a clear vision for IP requirements and the community as a whole, as well as a support structure. In most educational systems, indigenous teachers endure difficult obstacles, yet their experiences yield learning that is far superior to that of other teachers (OECD, 2017).

Additionally, teachers play a crucial role in carrying out initiatives to enhance indigenous education. Due to their restricted access to government assistance, teachers and IP students feel helpless. Moreover, teachers have been drawn to other opportunities due to their poor pay, restricted opportunities for professional growth, and unfavorable working environments (Ubalde, 2009). It should come as no surprise that educators in the IP community

are also urged to move—if not overseas, then at least to developed, urban areas and institutions.

Teaching indigenous students can be extremely difficult, particularly for teachers, but it can also be rewarding and enjoyable. For instance, teachers love the surrounding environment since it allows them to go hiking, camping, and fishing (Brasche & Harrington, 2012). They figure out how to fit in and find purpose in their profession while serving the community. Furthermore, they carry on teaching indigenous students due to their empathy for these students and their dedication to the teaching profession.

However, these teachers face a great deal of obstacles. For instance, there are issues with how they carry out their responsibilities. These include lack of resources, isolation from others geographically, and challenges in both social and professional spheres. Also, teachers usually have a problem understanding the language (Ahmad, 2015). It is difficult for the teachers working in these schools to convey the lessons in the vernacular. Despite the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Education by the Department of Education (DepEd), the majority of teachers were unable to speak or comprehend the language of the indigenous students.

In addition to the language barrier, teachers in indigenous schools must contend with other challenges such as a dearth of instructional resources, absentee students during particular seasons, low student motivation, and a lack of parental support. They have to collaborate with the native community as well (Phillips & Luke, 2017). Moreover, if they do not use a curriculum that is sensitive and relevant to the community, the indigenous people will not be satisfied. Teachers must also fully integrate into the indigenous community in order to gain a deeper understanding of both the indigenous learners and the community at large (Nesterova, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methods used by the researcher for undertaking this action research study. It covers population and sampling, instrumentation, data source, and data analysis.

Population and Sampling. The purpose of this research study was to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the Bajao community's blended learning implementation and outcomes, with the hope of transferring the findings to larger groups of educators and common practices. The sample population consisted of seven (7) teachers handling Bajao pupils from Zonta Elementary School in Isla Verde, Poblacion Davao City. The researcher chose the participants for two reasons. First, the district assigned them all to the same urban area. Second, the district selects this group of teachers to ensure representation of all teachers working with Bajao students at Zonta Elementary School. The limited number of teachers interviewed was due to the following reasons: First, a permit has to be secured from the City Social Welfare and Development Office; second, there might be only a few teachers handling Bajao learners.

Instrumentation. In order to collect data, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with study participants. The interview guide was validated by five experts. Three of these experts were members of the university's research examining committee, while the other two were experts from other universities or who were not members of the committee. During IDI, the researcher addressed three primary questions: (1) experiences; (2) the demands of Bajao learners in the New Normal Teaching Modality; and (3) insights gained for improving the new normal instructional delivery for IPs. The researcher continued to communicate with the participants after the in-depth interview (IDI).

In addition, all interviews were audiotaped and transcript verbatim. The researcher then conducted thematic content analysis on the participants' responses. Audio materials were reviewed to ensure that nothing was missed from the recording or written inaccurately. All of this was done to ensure that all data

collected and presented were accurate enough to provide substantive information and serve as evidence of major discoveries, as well as comprehensive analysis and interpretation.

Data Source. The researcher employed strict procedures to guarantee thorough data collection during the qualitative phase, effectively capturing the breadth and depth of participants' experiences. The researcher took the following actions to collect the required qualitative data: Initially the researcher asked permission to perform a study through written requests to both the Office of Division Superintendent and the Dean of the Graduate School of The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. Then, the researcher gave the teacher respondents access to the approved letter. Prior to collecting data, the researcher also followed up with each teacher respondent to make sure they fully understood the goals of the study and to get their informed consent. Furthermore, the content of the interview guide was approved by a panel of experts before it was utilized. These experts have been provided a validation sheet to assess the interview questions according to established guidelines. The experts had signed the form, written their comments, and provided their responses, which the researcher took into consideration. With the participants' consent, the researcher recorded the answers and stored them on a flash drive. The data gathered was then subjected to triangulation and thematic content analysis. The researcher employed triangulation techniques in addition to thematic content analysis to guarantee the validity and consistency of the results, offering a full understanding of the data.

Data analysis. The researcher systematically organized, coded, and analyzed the data using qualitative tools. Thematic Content Analysis and triangulation were employed for analyzing the data. Anderson (2007) defines thematic content analysis (TCA) as the descriptive presentation of qualitative data. Qualitative data are interview transcripts obtained from research participants or other identifiable texts that reflect experientially on the study's subject. This study evaluated the transcripts from the in-depth interviews to identify meaningful themes.

Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended six steps for doing thematic analysis as guidelines rather than prescriptive, linear, or inflexible rules when analyzing data. Instead, use them to address the study topic and accessible data. The six steps are as follows: (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Reviewing themes, (5) Defining and naming themes, (6) Producing the report. Additionally, according to Guion (2002), qualitative researchers use triangulation to verify and prove the validity of their findings. This method was utilized to confirm statements or information obtained during the In-depth Interview for this article. Using various methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis enables researchers to cross-verify findings and gain deeper insights that might not be visible through a single approach. Triangulation not only helps in uncovering deeper insights but also aids in identifying inconsistencies and contradictions. This process leads to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem, as it allows for the examination of the phenomenon from multiple perspectives, thereby enhancing the credibility and validity of the study. In phenomenological research, methodological triangulation is the most common of the five types of triangulations. Interviewing, evaluation, record analysis, and any other materials relevant to the research will be employed.

RESULTS

This part highlighted the results and discussion of the study. Themes were extracted based on participants' responses to each question. Experiences of teachers handling Bajao Learners, coping mechanisms and insights acquired are presented and discussed below.

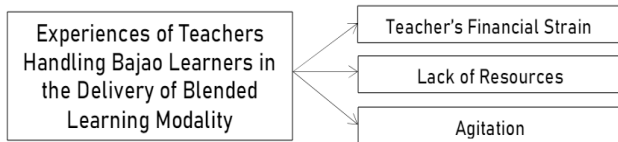


Figure 1
Experiences of Teachers Handling Bajao Learners in the Delivery of Blended Learning Modality

Figure 1 shows the experiences of teachers handling Bajao learners in the delivery of blended learning modality. The common experiences of teachers handling Bajao learners during the pandemic are centered on teacher's financial strain, lack of resources, and agitation.

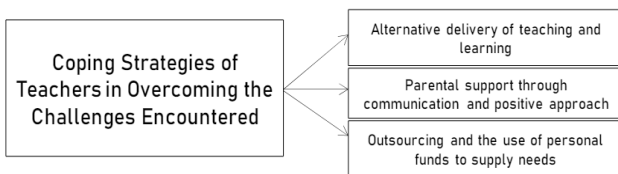


Figure 2
Coping Strategies of Teachers in Overcoming the Challenges Encountered

Figure 2 highlighted the coping mechanisms of teachers in overcoming the challenges in the delivery of blended learning to Bajao Learners. These coping mechanisms include alternative delivery of teaching and learning, encouraging parental support through communication and positive approach, and outsourcing and the use of personal funds to supply needs.

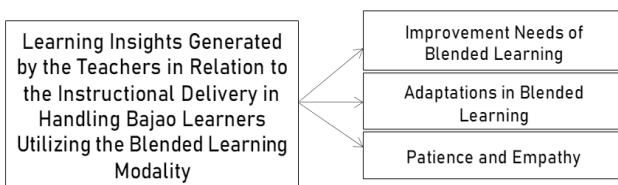


Figure 3
Learning Insights Generated by the Teachers in Relation to the Instructional Delivery in Handling Bajao Learners Utilizing the Blended Learning Modality

Figure 3 displayed the learning insights generated by the teachers in relation to the instructional delivery in handling Bajao learners utilizing the blended learning modality. The rich and genuine experiences of teachers resulting from their utilization of blended learning provided an opportunity to reflect on their profession. Their learning insights

revealed encouragement of continuing education for Bajao learners with proposed improvement in learning opportunities offered in blended modality.

DISCUSSION

The researcher identified three themes from the experiences of teachers handling Bajao learners in the delivery of blended learning modality: (1) financial strain, (2) lack of resources, and (3) agitation. Participants have shared that, teachers handling Bajao learners in an (IP) communities experience significant financial strain. This is primarily due to lower salaries compared to other districts and a lack of funding for essential supplies. Additionally, many students in these communities lack financial support from their parents, which often compels teachers to use their own money to help meet students' needs. Consequently, the combination of lower incomes, inadequate school funding, and personal expenses to support their students contributes to the financial strain faced by these teachers. Moreover, most of the participants expressed their personal feelings about the students' condition and how it affects their learning. Furthermore, Scougall (2008) discovered that there are certain barriers that impede the successful delivery of services to indigenous families and communities. Demanding workloads combined with inadequate pay make worker burnout a prevalent problem. Teachers, according to Weinstein (1989), are underpaid and mistreated. In 2005, the Philippine government paid only \$138 per student, compared to \$852 in Thailand, another developing country in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, the United Nations reports that just a few teachers can understand Indigenous languages, and their classrooms usually lack essential resources. Educational materials that provide accurate and balanced information on indigenous peoples and their ways of life are especially scarce, therefore teachers must use their own money to seek for these materials

Moreover, in relation to the lack of resources, the participants have shared that, the sudden shift to online remote learning demanded rapid

adjustments from students, necessitating upgrades in technical skills, home computers, audio-visual equipment, and internet service for many. However, participants have voiced concerns that a significant portion of students struggle to concentrate at home due to the lack of necessary learning equipment. This lack of resources poses a considerable challenge for teachers trying to engage all students effectively in remote or hybrid learning environments, especially considering that a majority of them lack access to electronic devices and internet connectivity. The aforementioned findings are consistent with those of Aud et al., (2010), who underlined that access to new educational technologies and innovations remains a difficulty. Similarly, Teachers have trouble obtaining resources in the indigenous setting since their education frequently lacks curricula and teaching techniques that acknowledge their communities' histories, cultures, pedagogies, local languages, and traditional knowledge. Approaches to revitalizing, preserving, and promoting Indigenous languages must be country and community specific. They must also be developed in collaboration and consultations with Indigenous Peoples. These are the reasons why indigenous teachers face a shortage of resources (Wodon & Cosentino, 2019).

Furthermore, teachers experienced agitation in handling Bajao learners due to the pandemic's longevity. The agitations felt by the participants are due to certain challenges such as limited access to technology and internet connectivity for both themselves and their students, inadequate resources for remote teaching, and the difficulties in effectively engaging students in a virtual environment, especially those who may already be facing various socio-economic barriers. The frustrations contributed to feelings of agitation by the teacher-participants as they handle the complexities of blended learning in Bajao communities. Also, it was found that teachers often experience burnout due to the demanding nature of their job. Constant mental pressure can develop to irritability, causing teachers brains to shut down and react when expectations are not met. The classroom is known as a source of

significant emotion and emotional work for teachers, and agitation is particularly detrimental in terms of well-being because it causes teacher stress and burnout (Barnard-Bahn & Le Pertel, 2023).

Teachers' coping strategies for overcoming the challenges they have encountered were: (1) alternative delivery of teaching and learning; (2) encouraging parental support through communication and a positive approach; and (3) outsourcing and the use of personal funds. In line with the use of alternative delivery of teaching and learning, the participants have shared that due to the lack of resources; particularly in blended-learning the teacher-participants have used alternative delivery of teaching and learning like self-learning modules (SLMs). To overcome the challenge in the lack of resources, teachers have developed alternative instructional strategies. Recognizing the importance of demonstrating the relevance of learning to students' future endeavors, they persist in their efforts to provide meaningful instruction. Despite the constraints, teacher participants are actively exploring authentic methods to ensure students achieve essential competencies. The results were consistent with a study that also stated that flexible teaching and learning encompass a wide range of techniques that can cater to the varying needs of students. These include "the availability of some degree of choice in the curriculum (including content, learning styles, and evaluation) and the use of contemporary information and communication technology to facilitate a diversity of learning strategies," according to the report (Alexander, 2010).

Moreover, the participants have emphasized the importance of encouraging parental support through communication and a positive approach, particularly in times of pandemic. They view parental participation as a critical and beneficial factor in facilitating learning, whether at home or in the community. Unfortunately, due to parents' illiteracy and poor priority on their children's education because of their economic situation, parents are unable to completely support learning: The participants shared how they constantly encourage parental support

through communication and a positive approach, such as extending more effort in contacting the parents, patience, and understanding of their situation. The findings above are supported by Goodall's (2016) study, which revealed the most challenging and favorable aspects of online learning for parents: keeping their children on schedule while completing their coursework as the former and interactions with the child's online teachers as the latter. In addition, schools and teachers simply do not have enough guidance to improve the parental engagement experience, especially with the effective use of technology.

Also, teacher-participants have shared common coping strategy to their everyday challenge in handling Bajao learners this is by outsourcing and the use of personal funds. By outsourcing materials or services, teachers acquired resources that were not available within their school's budget, just like additional textbooks and educational supplies necessary for effective teaching. Moreover, teacher-participants have also used their personal funds to cope with most of the common challenge in their job by providing additional support to students who lacked necessary resources at home like, school supplies, books, or even meals for students. Research indicates that teachers often resort to personal funding and external resources to address educational disparities, particularly when working with underprivileged or marginalized student groups such as Bajao learners. Studies highlight that educators frequently supplement their school's inadequate budgets by purchasing essential teaching materials, textbooks, and educational supplies out of their own pockets to ensure an effective learning environment (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Additionally, teachers' personal investments extend to providing basic needs like meals and school supplies, demonstrating a significant commitment to their students' overall well-being and educational success (O'Brennan et al., 2014). This practice underscores the systemic issues within educational funding and the extraordinary lengths to which teachers go to bridge resource gaps.

The learning insights generated by the teachers in relation to their instructional delivery in handling Bajao learners utilizing the blended learning modality revealed themes on (1) patience and empathy, (2) Adaptations of blended learning, and (3) improvement needs have blended learning. With patience and empathy, when teaching a variety of students, teachers must take into account their cultural backgrounds. Parents raise the Bajao students, who prioritize earning a living over schooling, from a young age. They are in a difficult situation due to a variety of socioeconomic challenges. Taking these factors into consideration allows teachers to evaluate their efforts and reflect on the values they must uphold. Teachers' responses highlighted the importance of patience in understanding learners' learning pace and needs, empathy for their struggles, a willingness to fully accept the uniqueness of these diverse learners, and a generous willingness to provide assistance in any possible way. The results are consistent with the findings of Schleicher (2017) who concluded that indigenous students face tough challenges in most education systems, thus while it may not be possible for every teacher to meet all of their indigenous students' needs in terms of language, culture, and identity, there is much that can be done to assist educators feel confident and competent in forming meaningful relationships with their indigenous students. Teachers who consider them to be cultural beings open the door to considering their students to have their own culture, which can have a significant impact on their views and behavior.

On the adaptations of blended learning, teacher-participants suggested that it is also important to provide a pathway towards students in IP communities, a pathway to overcome barriers to education while addressing the unique needs of the students. In these communities, although access to resources and technology may be limited, embracing blended learning will allow teachers to leverage both traditional and digital approaches to instruction, catering to diverse learning styles and preferences. By embracing this flexible approach, teachers can enhance

engagement, personalize learning experiences, and foster the development of essential digital literacy skills crucial for the constantly changing world, not only for the teachers but also for the common good of the students. Blended learning has emerged as a crucial strategy for overcoming educational barriers in Indigenous and marginalized communities, providing a balanced integration of traditional and digital instructional methods. According to Means et al. (2014) and Graham (2019) supports that blended learning can cater to diverse learning styles, enhance student engagement, and personalize educational experiences, even in resource-constrained settings. By incorporating digital literacy into the curriculum, teachers can prepare students for a rapidly evolving digital world, fostering essential skills that benefit both individual learners and the community at large.

Considering the analysis above and the implications it may bring, the Bajao pupils' teachers have concluded that using blended learning methods has helped students continue their education despite the pandemic. Nevertheless, despite the Department of Education's planning and preparations as well as those made by the school, difficulties encountered have placed restrictions on the way that learning is delivered. In particular, difficulties related to the context of instructions in SLMs (self-learning modules), problems establishing effective communication, a lack of parental support, and a lack of learning resources have limited this method. This study suggests that the Department of Education should highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address the challenges faced by teachers and students in delivering and accessing blended learning. This includes providing adequate funding for resources and training programs to equip teachers with the necessary skills for effective online instruction, as well as implementing initiatives to bridge the digital divide and improve the learning environment for Bajao students. Further, future researchers, should delve deeper into the specific needs and experiences of Bajao learners in blended learning contexts, exploring promising

practices and interventions that can further enhance educational outcomes.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest. I hereby declare that I have no conflict of interest regarding the study conducted entitled Lived Experiences of Teachers Handling Bajao Learners in the Context of Blended Learning: A Phenomenological Approach.

I affirm that I do not have any personal, financial, or professional interests that could potentially bias my decisions, actions, or recommendations in relation to the above-mentioned study.

I certify that I will act with integrity, impartiality, and transparency in all my dealings related to [the specific matter, project, or situation], ensuring that my decisions are solely based on merit, fairness, and the best interests of all involved parties.

I understand the importance of maintaining trust, credibility, and ethical standards, and I commit to upholding these principles throughout my involvement in the research journal project.

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