

Introspecting Monetary Challenges among DepEd Teachers: A Purview of Inquiry

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Abstract: This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of elementary school teachers on financial challenges in selected elementary schools in Davao Occidental. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected ten educators who participated in in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). Findings revealed five main themes on teachers' financial experiences, including salary insufficiency, additional expenses, financial planning and management, dependency on external support, and emotional and psychological impact. Moreover, four key coping mechanisms emerged: budgeting strategies, resource sharing and networks, emotional and social support, and personal financial literacy and learning. Additionally, the study identified three educational management insights, namely, strategic resource allocation, creative classroom management, and the pursuit of financial literacy and personal development. Collectively, these results underscore the resourcefulness and resilience of teachers facing ongoing financial pressures. By highlighting both practical coping techniques and broader institutional insights, the research provides valuable guidance for policymakers, school administrators, and educators alike. Ultimately, understanding these challenges and strategies can inform interventions that promote financial stability and enhance teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: Educational Management, Teachers' Financial Challenges, Phenomenological Study, Coping Strategies, Resource Sharing, Financial Literacy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping society, influencing the lives of their students and embodying a respected profession that impacts both personal and professional aspects of life. Similarly, an individual's financial situation significantly affects their productivity, daily habits, and motivation. However, a major challenge in financial management is the widespread lack of financial literacy, which limits people's ability to make sound financial decisions. Financial literacy involves both understanding and applying knowledge to effectively manage personal finances and achieve long-term financial stability.

Many countries recognized the widespread lack of financial literacy affecting teachers, leading to financial challenges like debt and poor retirement planning. In Australia, financial literacy was integrated into the school curriculum, while in the Philippines, financial difficulties among teachers prompted mandatory financial literacy training and policies to protect their income. In Davao Occidental, teachers faced struggles due to low wages and poor financial habits.

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of public elementary school teachers in Davao Occidental Division regarding financial literacy and management. Recognizing financial literacy as a continuous and evolving ability, the study sought to understand the

financial challenges teachers face, their causes, and how teachers manage these difficulties in their personal and professional lives.

During the study period, there was limited research on the financial literacy challenges faced by public school teachers in the local area using a phenomenological approach. This gap highlighted the need to explore teachers' experiences and coping strategies regarding financial literacy and management, especially during the pandemic, to better understand and share their realities.

This research was grounded in Rational Choice Theory, which suggests individuals make decisions to maximize their satisfaction based on their needs and limited resources. Teachers' financial behaviors reflect this, as they must carefully manage scarce resources like fixed salaries to meet various demands. The study also draws on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, highlighting how financial decisions are motivated by the desire to fulfill basic to higher-level needs, driving individuals to set goals and adapt their lifestyles accordingly.

II. METHOD

The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design with open-ended questions to explore teachers' lived experiences, particularly regarding their digital literacy and financial challenges. This approach helped capture the shared

meanings and personal perspectives of the participants, setting aside the researcher's own views. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted to gather detailed insights in a natural setting, allowing a holistic understanding of teachers' experiences. Phenomenology was chosen as it effectively reveals real-life, contextual experiences and helps identify common themes from the participants' narratives.

The study's philosophical assumptions guided the analysis and interpretation of results. Ontologically, the study recognized multiple realities based on individuals' perspectives, embracing diverse experiences as valid. Epistemologically, the researcher aimed to get close to participants to gather subjective knowledge from their lived experiences. Axiologically, the study acknowledged its value-laden nature by openly addressing researcher biases and values. Rhetorically, the researcher used a personal, informal writing style, including the first person to convey participants' experiences. The researcher aligned with postmodernism, valuing education as a means to foster critical thinking, creativity, cultural respect, and cooperative learning, emphasizing student-centered discovery and diverse perspectives.

Social Constructivism, as used in this study, views individuals as creators of their own unique meanings based on their experiences. These meanings are not innate but develop through social interactions and are shaped by historical and cultural contexts. The researcher focused on capturing the diverse and complex perspectives of participants, emphasizing subjective meanings rather than simplifying them into limited categories.

This study was conducted in DepEd Region XI, within a district of Davao Occidental, involving 10 purposely selected seasoned elementary school teachers from different schools. Purposive sampling was used to choose key informants based on their relevant knowledge and experience with financial challenges. Efforts were made to include diverse perspectives by selecting both male and female teachers with varying educational backgrounds and ranks. Participants were required to be public elementary teachers with at least five years of experience who had encountered financial issues.

The data was collected using a validated interview guide with three key questions about novice elementary school heads' experiences. Permission was obtained from relevant authorities before conducting interviews in private settings, both in person and online, with participants' consent for audio and video recording. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and no financial compensation. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and risks, and asked to avoid using real names. Interviews were transcribed using software and verified for accuracy through participant feedback.

The study used a qualitative analysis process where the researcher set aside personal biases to focus on participants' experiences. Significant statements were identified and grouped into themes to capture the essence of the

phenomenon. Thematic content analysis and document analysis were used to find patterns and validate findings, while environmental triangulation accounted for contextual factors. Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, the researcher transcribed, coded, refined themes, and produced a final report. Manual techniques like note-taking and color coding helped organize and interpret the data, ensuring a rich and credible understanding of participants' experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first section illustrated financial challenges faced by elementary school teachers are categorized into five themes: Salary Insufficiency, Additional Expenses, Financial Planning and Management, Dependency on External Financial Support, and Emotional and Psychological Impact. These themes highlight the various aspects of the teachers' economic struggles.

The second section tackled the coping strategies of elementary school teachers facing financial challenges include budgeting, resource sharing and networking, emotional and social support, and improving personal financial literacy. These approaches help teachers manage their financial difficulties and maintain emotional well-being.

The third section presented the educational management insights from public elementary teachers' experiences with financial challenges include strategic resource allocation, creative classroom management, and a focus on financial literacy and personal development. These themes highlight how teachers adapt and innovate to overcome financial constraints while improving their professional skills and classroom effectiveness.

The study found that elementary school teachers in Davao Occidental face financial challenges across five main areas: low and delayed salaries, extra personal expenses for work, difficulty managing finances, reliance on loans or help from family and friends, and emotional stress. To cope, teachers use budgeting, share resources and support networks, seek emotional support, and improve their financial knowledge. Despite these challenges, teachers develop valuable educational management skills, including strategic resource allocation, creative low-cost classroom strategies, and ongoing personal financial development to maintain both their teaching quality and well-being.

The findings showed that elementary teachers in Davao Occidental faced financial challenges such as low, delayed salaries and additional personal expenses, which affected both teaching quality and well-being. To address this, stakeholders were encouraged to push for stable pay systems and include financial literacy in professional development. Schools also supported teachers' mental health through counseling and peer mentoring to reduce financial stress.

Regarding coping strategies, schools offered guidance on budgeting and saving, promoted resource-sharing like lending libraries and community support, and fostered

emotional support through peer counseling and a positive work environment. Financial literacy training within professional development further empowered teachers to manage their finances effectively.

Educational management insights emphasized transparent budgeting, practical financial training, and collaboration in resource use. Encouraging cost-effective teaching methods and flexible technology use helped maintain quality with limited funds. Promoting continuous learning and work-life balance enabled teachers to handle financial stress while sustaining professional performance, highlighting creativity and personal growth as key in resource-limited settings.

The study recommended that the Department of Education create support programs on budgeting and financial literacy to help teachers manage financial challenges. School heads were advised to encourage transparent budgeting, resource-sharing, and workshops to foster collaboration and optimize resources. Teachers were encouraged to use practical coping strategies, build peer support, and improve financial literacy for resilience. Learners benefited from more prepared lessons and opportunities to learn budgeting skills. Future researchers were suggested to explore comparative studies and the long-term impact of financial interventions to guide policy and practice.

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