

Teaching at the Starting Line: Exploration of Grade 1 Teachers Standpoints

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Abstract. This study examined the experiences, coping mechanisms used, and educational insights learned by the teachers in teaching at the starting line. Qualitative approach to research phenomenological from the Eight (8) Grade 1 Teachers in Panabo Central District, Division of Panabo. The findings revealed that the experience in teaching at the starting line was observed as follows: bridged home and school culture, used mother-tongue-based multi-lingual education, and emphasized phonics and reading instruction. The coping mechanisms used in addressing the challenges were utilizing classroom management strategies, seeking social support, and managing time effectively. Finally, the findings revealed that the educational insights learned from teachers' experiences were engaging in self-care practices, welcoming parental involvement and support, and cultivating a love for learning. All these themes led to the identification of effective teaching strategies at the starting line of formal education, where educators can better tailor their approaches, identify areas for growth, and suggest ways to enhance their professional development to foster a strong foundation for future learning. This study may also be published in any respectable research journal. Finally, a valuable future direction for research could focus on the role of continuous professional development for Grade 1 teachers. Understanding how ongoing training and support contribute to effective teaching practices, particularly in the foundational years, could provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and institutions.

KEY WORDS

1. Starting line. 2. Grade 1 Teachers. 3. Davao City, Philippines.

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1. Introduction

The education journey starts at the beginning, where Grade 1 teachers play a pivotal role in laying the foundation for a child's academic and personal growth. Teaching at the starting line requires a deep understanding of young learners and the ability to navigate the challenges and seize the opportunities that come with shaping their educational experience. Understanding the experiences and viewpoints of teachers is crucial in enhancing educational practices and ensuring positive outcomes for young learners. In Finland, Grade 1 teachers approach teaching at the starting line, focusing on child-centered education and play-based learning. They prioritize creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment where young students can explore, inquire, and actively participate in their learning journey. Grade 1 teachers

in Finland often utilize a variety of pedagogical approaches, including hands-on activities, cooperative learning, and interdisciplinary projects, to engage students and foster their holistic development (Sahlberg, 2019). Furthermore, literacy instruction of Grade 1 teachers in Finland emphasizes the joy of reading and storytelling. They create opportunities for students to engage with a wide range of literature, promoting a love for reading and developing language skills. Phonics and phonemic awareness are integrated into instruction to support students' early reading abilities. Writing instruction focuses on creative expression and developing students' written communication skills (Sahlberg, 2019). In the United States, grade 1 teachers employ a balanced approach to teaching at the starting line, focusing on building foundational skills while promoting active engagement and critical thinking. They provide a combination of direct instruction and student-centered learning experiences to meet the diverse needs of young learners. In literacy instruction, Grade 1 teachers often emphasize phonics, decoding skills, and reading fluency while fostering a love for reading through storytelling, shared reading, and guided reading activities. They incorporate interactive and hands-on activities to enhance comprehension and vocabulary development (NAEYC, 2019). Additionally, Grade 1 teachers in the United States recognize the importance of social and emotional development. They create a positive, inclusive classroom environment that promotes respectful interactions, empathy, and cooperation. Teachers often incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies, such as teaching self-regulation techniques and promoting positive behavior, to support their students' overall well-being and social skills development (CASEL, 2019). In Singapore, Grade 1 teachers approach teaching at the starting line with a focus on a structured and rigorous curriculum that emphasizes foundational skills and academic excellence. They prioritize building a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy, ensuring students develop essential language and mathematical competencies. Grade 1 teachers often employ a combination of explicit instruction, structured activities, and regular assessments to monitor student progress and provide targeted support (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2020). Furthermore, literacy instruction of Grade 1 teachers in Singapore emphasize phonics, reading fluency, and comprehension strategies. They use a systematic approach to teach letter-sound correspondence and decoding skills, gradually progressing to reading simple texts independently. Writing instruction focuses on developing handwriting skills, sentence construction, and basic grammar and punctuation rules. Teachers also integrate speaking and listening activities to enhance communication skills (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2020). In the Philippines, Grade 1 teachers employ a child-centered approach to teaching at the starting line, focusing on the holistic development of young learners. They prioritize creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment where students feel safe to explore, express themselves, and engage actively in their learning. Grade 1 teachers often use a combination of instructional strategies, including direct instruction, cooperative learning, and hands-on activities, to cater to the diverse learning needs of their students (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). Meanwhile, literacy instruction of Grade 1 teachers in the Philippines emphasizes phonics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. They utilize various approaches, such as shared reading, guided reading, and storytelling, to foster a love for reading and develop language skills. Writing instruction focuses on building foundational skills, including letter formation, spelling, and basic sentence structure. Teachers also incorporate oral communication activities to enhance students' speaking and listening skills (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). In the local scenario,

particularly in the schools of Panabo Central District, Division of Panabo City, grade 1 teachers encountered various teaching experiences in the starting line. Some experiences enrich while others negatively affect the teaching profession. In this context, this study was conceptualized to collect the experiences of grade teachers as they teach at the starting line.

1.1. Purpose of the Study—This phenomenological study aimed to discover the experiences of grade 1 teachers as they teach in

- (1) What are the experiences of grade 1 teachers as they teach in the starting line?
- (2) What are the experiences of grade 1 teachers as they teach in the starting line?
- (3) What educational management insights gained are drawn from the experiences of the informants?

To determine the outcomes of this study and to whom the findings are addressed, the following persons or agencies were the beneficiaries. Department of Education Officials. The study's findings would give the DepEd officials, particularly in the Panabo Central district and the nearby schools in the Panabo City division, the awareness to teach at the starting line. Teachers. The study would be significant to them since they would know the issues and insights on their experiences as they teach in the starting line. Stakeholders. This study would be significant to them since it would give them insights on how to assist school administrators in capacitating grade 1 teachers in teaching strategies at the starting line. Future Researchers. The findings provided comprehensive data for future research with similar or relevant scope. The following terms were operationally defined to make this study more comprehensive. Teaching at the starting line- Teaching at the starting line refers to the foundational instruction provided to young learners at the beginning of their formal education journey, setting the stage for their future academic progress and holistic development. Grade 1 teachers. A Grade 1 teacher was an educator responsible for instructing and

the starting line. Furthermore, it would serve as reference material for future researchers in this area. The results would also shed more light on the experiences, mechanisms, and insights drawn from the experiences of the informants.

1.2. Research Questions—The study intended to get the insights and experiences of grade 1 teachers as they teach in the starting line. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

supporting students at the first-grade level of primary or elementary school, focusing on foundational skills and facilitating their transition into formal education.

1.3. Review of Related Literature—

1.3.1. Teaching at the Starting Line—Teaching Grade 1 is a critical stage where educators have the opportunity to instill a love for learning and build foundational skills. Grade 1 teachers use various instructional strategies such as play-based learning, direct instruction, and collaborative activities to engage students and support their development in literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills (Department of Education Philippines 2013; Singapore Ministry of Education 2020).

1.3.2. Experiences of Grade 1 Teachers—Grade 1 teachers play a vital role in shaping students' academic, social, and emotional development. They bridge home and school cultures by involving parents and the community in the learning process through collaborations and cultural events. This connection enhances students' sense of belonging and academic achievement (National Association for the Education of Young Children 2009; Department of Education Philippines 2018; Moll et al. 2022; Epstein

2021; Banks 2019; Bernstein Arnone 2019).

1.3.3. Coping Mechanisms—Grade 1 teachers face various challenges, including classroom management and adapting to diverse learning needs. Effective classroom management strategies, self-care practices, and seeking social support are essential coping mechanisms. Teachers establish clear expectations and routines to create a structured learning environment and prioritize their physical and mental well-being through self-care activities. They also seek support from colleagues and professional networks to enhance their teaching practice (Akhtar 2020; Marzano Marzano 2023; Friedman-Krauss et al. 2020; Harris 2019; Brown et al. 2017).

1.3.4. Parental Involvement—Welcoming parental involvement is crucial for Grade 1 teachers. They establish open communication with parents and encourage their participation in their child's education through regular updates and involvement in school activities. This partnership positively impacts students' academic achievement and social-emotional development (Department of Education Philippines 2018; Epstein 2021; Deslandes Bertrand 2018; Henderson Mapp 2022).

1.3.5. Time Management—Grade 1 teachers manage their time effectively by prioritizing tasks and organizing instructional materials. They engage in reflective practices to improve

their time management skills and participate in professional development opportunities to learn new strategies (Schön 2017; Cirillo 2018).

By employing these strategies and fostering strong partnerships with parents and the community, Grade 1 teachers create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that benefits students' overall development.

1.4. Theoretical Lens—This study is anchored on Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977. This theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and modeling in shaping human behavior. This theory suggests that individuals learn by observing others and imitating their behaviors, attitudes, and responses. In the context of grade 1 teachers' experiences, Social Learning Theory can be applied to understand how teachers acquire knowledge, skills, and instructional strategies by observing and learning from more experienced teachers or through professional development opportunities (Bandura, 1977). The second theory used in this study is Self-Efficacy Theory, also proposed by Albert Bandura (1997). This theory focuses on individuals' beliefs in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks or achieve desired outcomes. According to this theory, individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach challenges with confidence, persistence, and resilience. In the context of grade 1 teachers, Self-Efficacy

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1. Based on the figure, there are three interconnected variables. These variables are the: Experiences of grade teachers in teaching at the starting line; coping mechanisms of grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line; and Educational insights drawn from the experiences of the informants. Theory can be used to explore how teachers' beliefs in their instructional abilities and their perceptions of their students' capabilities influence

their teaching practices, motivation, and overall effectiveness (Bandura, 1997). The third theory used in this study is Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals within the context of their environment and the multiple systems that influence their development. This theory suggests that individuals' experiences and interactions are shaped by various ecological systems, including the microsystem (immediate environ-

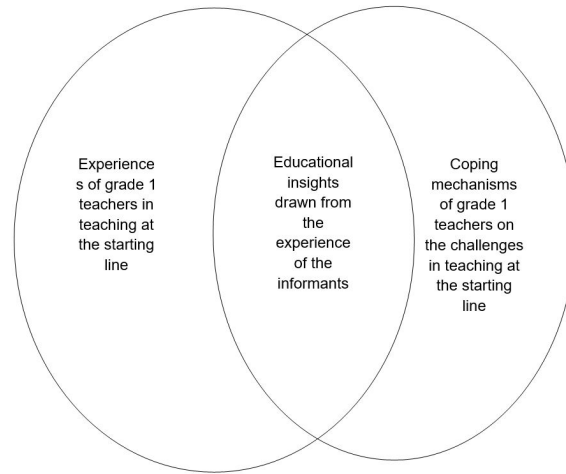


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

ment) and mesosystem (connections between different microsystems). In the study of grade 1 teachers' experiences, Ecological Systems Theory can be used to explore how factors such as the school environment, classroom dynamics, parental involvement, and community support influence teachers' practices, well-being, and overall teaching experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2. Methodology

This chapter of the study presented the method, research participants, data collection, role of the researcher, data analysis, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations. Exploring facts and knowledge in this study necessitated the consequent design and implementation, as elaborated in this chapter.

2.1. Philosophical Assumptions—Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as an exploration to understand the structure and essence of individuals' experiences with a specific phenomenon. This research aligns with that definition, seeking to grasp the experiences of grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line. However, Giorgi (2007) cautioned researchers to anticipate a more thorough and detailed investigation than the initial description might indicate. He likened the information provided to just the tip of an iceberg, suggesting that much greater depth and complexity lie beneath the surface. The philosophical assumption is a framework used to collect, analyze, and interpret data in a specific field of study. It established the background used to reach conclusions and decisions. Typical philosophical assumptions have different types and are elaborated below. Good research begins with selecting the topic, problem, or area of interest, as well as the paradigm. Stanage (1987) traces 'paradigm' back to its Greek (paradigm) and Latin origins (paradigma), meaning pattern, model, or example among examples, an exemplar or model to follow according to which design actions are taken. Differently stated, a paradigm was an action of submitting to a view. This view was supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), who defend a research paradigm as a "basic set of beliefs that guide action", dealing with first principles, "ultimates" or the researcher's worldview or philosophy. Ontology. This part of the research pertains to how the issue relates to the nature of reality. According to Creswell (2012), reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by the study participants.

The ontological issue addresses the nature of reality for the qualitative researcher. The reality was constructed by individuals involved in the research situation. Thus, multiple realities exist, such as the realities of the researcher, those of individuals being investigated, and those of the reader or audiences interpreting the study. In this study, experiences of grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line are discussed by the participants and tries to look into their coping mechanisms in addressing the challenges and educational insights learned. In this study, I relied on the voices and interpretations of the participants through extensive quotes and themes that reflected their words and provided evidence of different perspectives. The participant's answers to the study were coded and analyzed to build and construct the commonality and discreteness of responses. The participants' responses were carefully coded to ensure the reliability of the result. The researcher upheld the authenticity of the reactions and precluded from making personal bias as the study progressed. Epistemology. This refers to the awareness of how knowledge claims are justified by staying as close to the participants as possible during the study to obtain firsthand information. Guba and Lincoln, as cited by Creswell (2012), state that I lessen the distance between myself and the participants on the epistemological assumption. He suggests that, as a researcher, he or she collaborates, spends time in the field with participants, and becomes an 'insider'. Based on Davidson (2000) and Jones (2011). Researcher identified phenomenology with the use of thematic analysis as the best means for this type of study. In this regard, individual researchers "hold explicit belief". This study intended to gather information from the participants or grade 1 teachers in Panabo Central District as to their experiences in teaching at the starting line. It is assumed that there was an establishment of close interaction with the participants to gain direct information that would shed light on the knowledge behind

the inquiry, particularly on the experiences and strategies used in the provision of school emergencies. Axiology refers to the role of values in research. Creswell (2012) avers that the role of values in a study was significant. Axiology suggests that I openly discuss the values that shape the narrative and include their interpretation in conjunction with the interpretation of participants. I ensured the dignity and value of every detail of information obtained from the participants. I understand the personal and value-laden nature of information gathered from the study. Therefore, I preserved the merit of the participants' answers and carefully interpreted them in light of their interpretations. Rhetoric. It means that reporting what reality was through the eyes of the research participants. This was important because it meant that the research would report objectively what was observed and heard from the participants. The research used personal voice and qualitative terms and limited definitions. In the context of the study, I used the first person in the elucidation of the experiences of grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line.

2.2. *Qualitative Assumptions*—The methodology was different from the method. The methodology is a creative and responsive approach to understanding questions and subject matter, while the method refers to the exact knowledge and procedure (Gerodias, 2013). In this study, the experiences of grade 1 teachers teaching at the starting line in Panabo Central District were gathered through an in-depth interview (IDI), and their coping mechanisms were extracted from the participants. The researcher's drive to know the deeper meaning of the experiences of grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line became the basis for doing qualitative research, a means by which Kalof and Dietz (2008), as cited from Gerodias, (2013) considered helpful in looking for "meanings and motivations that underline cultural symbols, personal experiences, and phenomena." Using phenomenology, this need was hoped to be ad-

dressed by bringing the experiences of grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line in a manner that, as David (2005) wrote, the themes, symbols, and meaning of the experiences presented. Phenomenological research was based on two premises. The first was that experience was a valid, rich, and rewarding source of knowledge. According to Becker (1992), as cited in Morrissey Higgs (2006), experience is a source of knowledge that shapes one's behavior. From the definition, human experience was viewed as a cornerstone of knowledge about human phenomena and not an unreliable source. The second premise of phenomenological research lies in the view that the everyday world is a valuable and productive source of knowledge and that we can learn much about ourselves and reap critical insights into the nature of an event by analyzing how it occurs in our daily lives (Morrissey Higgs, 2006). By doing phenomenology, which concerns the "what" and the "how" (Moustakas, 1995), I projected that the experience mechanisms used by grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line were explored, and insights learned were the basis for possible future research and policy analysis in relation to this research.

2.3. Design and Procedure—This study employed a qualitative approach to research, specifically a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell, (2012), phenomenology was an approach to qualitative research focused on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. Typically, interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation or experience. Other forms of data such as documents, observations and art were also used. The data were read and reread and was culled for phrases and themes that was grouped into clusters of meanings. Through this process, I

was able to construct the universal meaning of the event, situation, or experience and arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, Maxwell (2013) also added that phenomenology, with its roots in philosophy, psychology, and education, attempts to extract the purest, untainted data. In some interpretations of the approach, I used bracketing to document personal experiences with the subject to help remove him or her from the process. One method of bracketing was taking notes. According to Corbetta (2003), the phenomenological research design was a qualitative type of research for which interviews provide an in-depth method that can grant access to deep knowledge and explanations and help grasp the subjects' perspective. Creswell (2012) also claimed that interviews were primarily done in qualitative research and occur when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers. Often, audio tapes were utilized to allow more consistent transcription—interviews were also useful to follow up with individual respondents after questionnaires, such as to further investigate their responses. In qualitative research, interviews were used to pursue the meanings of central themes in the world of their subjects. The main task in doing interviews was to understand the meaning of what the interviewees said (McNamara, 1999). Withal, based on the statements of Quad (2016), I transcribed and typed the data into a computer file to analyze it after interviewing. Interviews are useful for uncovering the story behind a participant's experiences and pursuing in-depth information about a topic. I collected data, typically via long interviews, from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. Next, the data analysis involved triangulation, extracting significant statements from the transcribed interviews. The important statements were transformed into clusters of meanings according to how each statement fell under spe-

cific psychological and phenomenological concepts. Moreover, these transformations were tied up together to make a general description of the experience both the textural description of what was experienced and the structural description of how it was experienced. I incorporated his or her meaning of the experiences here. Finally, the report was written so that readers could better understand the essential, invariant structure of the essence of the experience. Conversely, several challenges have been pointed out. I required a solid grounding in the philosophical guidelines of phenomenology. The subjects selected for the study were individuals who had actually experienced the phenomenon. I needed to bracket their own experiences and observations, which was difficult. I also needed to decide how and when to incorporate their personal observations into the study. Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches were based on the paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasized the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such, they were powerful tools for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the cluster of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom. Since the focus of this study is to explore and assess the experiences and feelings of disaster risk reduction management coordinators in the provision of school emergencies, I employed the phenomenology type of qualitative method research.

2.4. Ethical Considerations—The ethical considerations were significant in the design of this research study. I needed to consider several ethical issues regarding the research participants in this field. Ethical considerations were specified as one of the most essential parts of the research. I needed to adhere to promote the study aims, imparting authentic knowledge, truth, and error prevention. Social Value. The research was essential to society. In this study,

the social value was focused on the experience of disaster risk reduction management coordinators. This study was explicitly conducted among the elementary disaster risk reduction management coordinators. This study also served as a basis for the higher authorities to create more programs and resolutions where disaster risk reduction management coordinators could benefit. Thus, the social problem that piqued my interest was the challenges faced by grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line. Informed Consent. In the conduct and practice of this study, the Treaty Principle of Participation, as cited by McLeod (2009), was adhered to. The invitation to the participants ensured that their participation in the research was completely voluntary and based on understanding adequate information. The participant recruitment and selection are lodged in the appendices of this study. Gaining the trust and support of research participants was critical to informed and ethical academic inquiry and phenomenological research (Walker, 2007, as cited by Pillerin, 2012). All participants were given an informed consent form before scheduling the interviews and participating in the phenomenological research process. Each participant was required to provide a signed personal acknowledgment, consent, and an indication of a willingness to participate in the study release. The purpose of the informed consent letter was to introduce the research effort, provide contact information, articulate the study's intent, request voluntary participation by the recipients, and anticipate the information the informants were expected to provide. All participants were required to sign and return the consent letter to the researcher before participating in the research. Vulnerability of Research Participants. The participants of this study could answer the research instrument because they were all professional teachers in public elementary schools. Thus, I assured them that as the researcher, he or she can easily be reached through the contact number and address

in case there are some clarifications or questions about the study. Risks, Benefits, and Safety. The recruitment of the respondents was free of coercion, undue influence, or inducement. Moreover, respondents were provided with the contact numbers of the panel chair or panel members in case they had queries related to the study. Furthermore, if respondents experienced potential discomfort and inconvenience while answering the questions, they were not compelled to participate in any manner. Moreover, I ensured that the respondents were safe during the survey and interview. Thus, the distribution of the questionnaire was conducted in a secure venue and administered during their convenient time. The dominant concern of this study was the Treaty Principle of Protection, as reflected in the respect for the rights of privacy and confidentiality and the minimization of risk. This was done by assigning pseudonyms for each informant so as not to disclose their identity. The possibility of a degree of risk inherent to this was minimized by taking all reasonable steps to guarantee participant confidentiality. Privacy and Confidentiality of Information. This study observed the Data Privacy Act of 2002 to ensure that the data cannot be traced back to their real sources to protect participants' identities. Thus, utmost care was taken to ensure the anonymity of the data sources. Hence, any printed output that was carried out from this study was kept in anonymity. Furthermore, all the issues were considered so there would be no conflict of interest among the researcher and the respondents. Any misleading information and representation of primary data findings in a biased way must be avoided. Justice. During data gathering, the respondents were informed of my role and their corresponding role. They were briefed that they had to be fully honest in answering the survey questions and that any type of communication related to the research should be done with honesty. Similarly, they were informed that they were the ones to benefit first from the study's

results. Transparency. The study results were accessed by the respondents and heads of the participating schools because the information was available and placed on CD or other storage devices, which I could request. In addition, by learning about the study's results, classroom teachers were aware of the significance of the study and its contribution to their well-being. Further, each participant was advised that they have the right to withdraw their information at any time up to the completion of the data collection process and that they could request and be allowed to verify their transcript after the interview. This allowed the participants to amend or remove any information they felt might identify them. I reserved the right to employ the use of pseudonyms and changing names and or non-significant dates in the interest of the protection of the identity of the participant in all subsequent data analysis and reporting. Qualification of the Researcher. I assure you that I possess the needed qualifications to conduct the study. I have completed my academic requirements, passed the comprehensive examination prior to thesis writing, which was the last requirement to obtain my master's degree, and am qualified to conduct the study physically, mentally, emotionally, and financially. In addition, the advisee-adviser tandem ensured that the study would reach its completion. Adequacy of Facilities. I strived to complete this study successfully in the specified time and that I would be equipped with the necessary resources. Likewise, the technical committee helped me enhance the paper by giving the needed suggestions and recommendations for improving it. Also, I ensured that I had enough funds to continue and finish this research. Thus, this study was hoped to be completed in the target time. Community Involvement. I showed respect for the local traditions, culture, and views of the respondents in this study. Moreover, this study did not use deceit in any stage of its implementation, specifically in recruiting the participants or data col-

lection methods. Furthermore, I expressed great pleasure at the wholehearted participation of the interviewees in the conduct of the study. Plagiarism and Fabrication. I respected other works by properly citing the author and rewriting what someone else has said in his or her own way. I also used quotes to indicate that the text had been taken from another paper. Similarly, I ensured that honesty was present in working on the manuscript, and no intentional misrepresentation and making up of data or results was included, or I purposefully put forward conclusions that were not accurate.

2.5. Research Participants—Qualitative analyses typically require a smaller sample size than quantitative analyses. Qualitative sample sizes were large enough to obtain feedback for most perceptions. Obtaining most or all of the perceptions that lead to the attainment of saturation. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study did not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends five (5) to 25, and Morse (1994) suggests at least six (6). There were no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may be best determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990). This study's participants were Eight (8) grade 1 teachers in Panabo Central District, Division of Panabo City. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: they must have been in the service for at least five years, they must be elementary school teachers, and they must be handling grade 1 pupils. I utilized the purposive sampling design since the participants were chosen based on the criteria or purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). It was also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. The selection of the participants was purpose-

fully done to ensure that the findings were authentic (Marshall, 1996).

2.6. Role of the Researcher—I had a responsibility to uncover, transfer and exploit knowledge for the benefit of educational institutions. To do so, I take up the following roles in the course of the study: Facilitator and Promoter of Unbiased Research. I conducted the interview to the participants and guide them in the process. I interpreted the ideas and responses base on existing literatures and related studies and not on my own knowledge, thoughts and feelings to avoid the intrusion of bias. Expert in qualitative method. I implemented the qualitative method correctly. To do so, I assessed myself and seeks help to the research adviser and other research professionals. These help him exhibit competence in explaining the study without biasing the participants, conducting interview properly according to the design, making appropriate field observations, selecting appropriate artifacts, images, and journal portions, employing environmental triangulation and thematic content analysis precisely. Collector and Keeper of data. I ensured different ways of making a record of what was said and done during the interview and Focus Group Discussion, such as taking handwritten notes or audio and video recording. The recordings were transcribed verbatim before data analysis began. Records keeping was done by myself and is properly secured as it contains sensitive information that was relevant to the research. However, the data that was collected was my primary responsibility of safeguarding it for the participants. Mechanisms for such safeguarding were clearly articulated to participants and were approved by a relevant research ethics review board before the research began. Data Analyst. I ensured that the phenomenon or problem from the participants' perspective was gathered by interpreting data, transcribing and checking, reading between the lines, coding, and theming. I also ensured that the findings were true to the

participants and that their voices were heard. I organized and presented data. I presented the problem and the related literature and studies that support it. I also presented the study's findings by research question, stating the results for each one using themes to show how the research questions were answered in the study. Moreover, I gave future directions and implications of the study for improving educational policy and practices.

2.7. Data Collection—The following was the step-by-step process of gathering the data needed. Securing endorsement from the Dean of Graduate School. I asked for an endorsement from the Dean of the college where the researcher is studying as one of the documents needed for submission to the office of the Schools Division Superintendent in asking permission to conduct the study. I asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent to conduct the study in the identified school. I sent a letter addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent with Chapters 1 and 2 attached, together with the research instrument, which explains the objectives of the study and the identification of the participants. I waited for the SDS's response before I conducted it. Asking for permission from the Public School District Supervisor. After securing the SDS's approval, I sent letters to the supervisor explaining the study to be conducted in their cluster/district. I asked permission from the school heads. After securing the PSDS's approval, I sent letters to the principals explaining the study to be conducted in their schools. Obtaining consent from the participants. I asked permission from the participants and their parents/guardians. They were formally oriented about the study and the process they would go through as participants. Conducting the interview. I conducted the in-depth interview using the interview questionnaire. I took the participants' profiles, jotted down notes, and recorded conversations using a sound recorder for easy transcription. I lis-

tened carefully and responded actively during the interviews. Transcribing the responses of the interviewees. I transcribed the reactions of the interviewees precisely by recalling their answers from the sound recorder. Since the participants used their vernacular language, I translated it into English. Data Coding and Thematic Content Analysis. After the transcription, the data were categorized and coded. Then, themes were extracted, and individual data within the participants was compared and contrasted. I conducted a second round of interviews (FGD) to corroborate any data that needed further explanation and input from the participants. Additional information gathered was examined thoroughly and integrated into the existing body of data. After this, data were compared and contrasted between the participants to come up with patterns and trends.

2.8. Data Analysis—In this study, thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the gathered data. I analyzed the answers of the participants from the conducted interviews using Creswell's Model, specifically the identifying of themes approach. According to Creswell (2012), themes in qualitative research were similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database. Familiarization with the data was common to all forms of qualitative analysis, I immersed myself in, and became intimately familiar with, their data; reading and re-reading the data and noting any initial analytic observations. Coding was also a common element of many approaches to qualitative analysis, involving generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis. Coding was not simply a method of data reduction; it was also an analytic process, so codes capture both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data. I coded every data item and ends this phase by collating all their codes and relevant data extracts. Searching for themes was coherent and meaningful pattern in the data

relevant to the research question. I ended this phase by collating all the coded data relevant to each theme. Reviewing themes. I reflected on whether the themes tell a convincing and compelling story about the data, and began to define the nature of each individual theme, and the relationship between the themes. For these, Thematic Content Analysis was employed by the researcher. Thematic Content Analysis was a descriptive presentation of qualitative data in which a detailed analysis of each theme was made by identifying the ‘essence’ of each theme and constructing a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme (Andersen, 2013). In addition, to enhance validity and to create a more in-depth picture of the phenomenon, Environmental Triangulation was also employed by the researcher. It was a technique to analyze the results of the same study using different data collection methods. The key was identifying which environmental factors, if any, might influence the information that is received during the study. These environmental factors were changed to see if the findings were the same across the settings (David, 2015). This type of triangulation uses different settings, locations, and other factors such as time, day, and season in which the study occurred. The idea was to determine which of these factors influence the information received, these factors were then changed to see if the findings were the same. If the findings remain unaltered under varying environmental factors, then validity was established (Naeem, Saira, 2019). In this study, such triangulation was used considering that the requirement, as mentioned, was the use of environmental triangulation best suited to the environment of the research being conducted. Writing up involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data and contextualizing it about existing literature.

2.9. *Analytical Framework*—The analytical framework for this study was flexible

enough to allow the researcher to either gather all of the data and then analyze it or evaluate it while it was being collected. The data collected was then sifted, charted, and categorized in line with key topics and themes during the analysis stage. This process involves familiarization, coding, developing a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation (Ritchie Spencer, 1994). Familiarization was becoming familiar with the data through reading and re-reading interview transcripts. Familiarizing the whole interview with the audio recording and transcript and any contextual or reflective notes the researcher recorded was a vital stage in interpretation. It could also be helpful to re-listen to all or parts of the audio recording. The researcher becomes immersed in the data by listening to audiotapes, exploring the field, or reading transcripts. The researcher would become aware of critical ideas and recurring themes throughout the procedure and would make a note of them. The researcher may be unable to review all of the material due to the enormous amount of data that might be collected in qualitative research. As a result, a portion of the data set would be utilized. Several elements of the data collection method would influence the selection. Coding was the process of summarizing and representing data in order to provide a systematic account of the recorded or observed phenomenon. After familiarization, the researcher carefully reads the transcript line by line, applying a paraphrase or label that is a ‘code’ that describes what they have interpreted in the passage as necessary. Coding aimed to classify all of the data to be compared systematically with other parts of the data set. Developing a thematic framework happens after coding a few transcripts. The researcher needs to compare the labels applied and select a set of codes to apply to all subsequent transcripts. Codes could be grouped into categories, which are then clearly defined. This forms a working analytical framework. Several iterations of

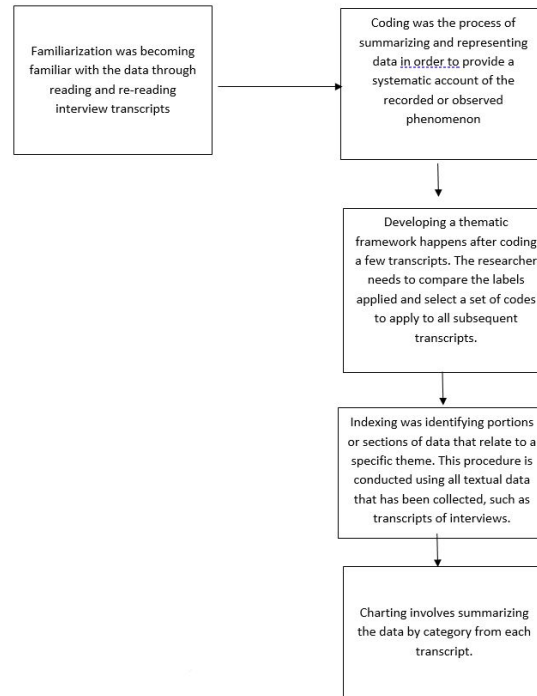


Fig. 2. Analytical Framework of the Study

the analytical framework were likely required before no additional codes emerged. It was always worth having another code under each category to avoid ignoring data that does not fit; the analytical framework was never ‘final’ until the last transcript had been coded. Indexing involves identifying portions or sections of data

that relate to a specific theme. This procedure is conducted using all textual data collected, such as transcripts of interviews. Ritchie and Spencer (1994) suggest using a numerical system to index references and annotating them in the margin beside the text for ease. Qualitative data analysis tools are ideal for this task.

Charting involves summarizing the data by category from each transcript. Good charting requires an ability to strike a balance between reducing the data on the one hand and retaining the original meanings and ‘feel’ of the interviewees’ words on the other. The chart should include references to interesting or illustrative quotations. The final stage, mapping, and interpretation, includes an analysis of the important qualities depicted in the charts. This analysis should be able to provide a schematic diagram of the event/phenomenon, assisting the researcher in interpreting the data set. I must be cognizant of the objectives of qualitative analysis and define concepts, map the range and nature of phenomena, create typologies, find

associations, provide explanations, and develop strategies (Ritchie Spencer, 1994). These concepts, technologies, and associations mirror the participant. Therefore, any strategies or recommendations the researcher offers reflect the participants’ real views, beliefs, and values. Figure 2 shows the steps in the process of the study’s analytical framework, which involves familiarization, coding, developing a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping, and interpretation.

2.10. Trustworthiness of the Study—Trustworthiness was all about establishing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. In a qualitative study, trustworthiness is very important because the result and finding of the

research study would depend on the process of how the researcher conducts it. The trustworthiness of a research study is important to evaluate its worth. Due to the nature of the qualitative study, honesty in all the data and details was required. Trustworthiness makes the researcher's study worthy to read, share, and be proud of. Credibility was how confident the qualitative researcher was in the truth of the research study's findings. The researcher in this study believed that honesty in everything you do was essential to attain worthwhile success. The researcher has no derogatory records or administrative issues that ruin her integrity. Lincoln and Guba (2000) stated that credibility refers to the idea of internal consistency, where the main issue was "how we ensured rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so." Transferability was how the qualitative researcher demonstrated that the research study's findings applied to other contexts. In this case, "other contexts" can mean similar situations, similar populations, and similar phenomena. The researcher has already studied the effects of using graphic organizers to teach reading comprehension. Using graphic organizers as a strategy for teaching reading comprehension is effective in the domains of analysis and creation. With this, the researcher is interested in the students' perspective on using this strategy. Gasson (2004) emphasized transferability as the extent to which the reader was able to provide a generalization of the study based on his context and could be able to address the core issue of "how far a researcher may make a claim for a general application of the theory." Confirmability was the degree of neutrality in the research study's findings. In other words, this means that the findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. This involves making sure that researcher bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a certain narrative. The information used in the audit trail in this situation was thoughtfully recorded by the researcher, which highlights every step of data analysis that was made in order to provide a rationale for the decisions made. This helps establish that the research study's findings accurately portray participants' responses. Gasson (2004) states that confirmability was based on the acknowledgment that research is never objective. Dependability was the extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. In other words, if a person wanted to replicate your study, they should have enough information from your research report to do so and obtain similar findings as your study did. A qualitative researcher uses an inquiry audit in order to establish dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings are consistent and can be repeated. In this component, the use of a database was very important in backing up information collected and noting changes for all types of research studies. All the data collected was properly kept for future use as references. Gasson (2004) stated that dependability deals with the core issue that "the way in which a study is conducted should be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques."

3. Results and Discussion

This part of the research dealt with the study's research questions. The participants disclosed their experiences in teaching at the starting line, their coping mechanisms, and their insights. All these themes were discussed.

3.1. Experiences of Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line—The experiences of Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line encompass a critical phase of education, where they navigate the challenges and opportunities of guiding young learners through their initial steps in formal schooling. These educators play a fundamental role in shaping students' academic, social, and emotional development as they embark on their educational journey. By understanding and responding to young learners' unique needs and capabilities, Grade 1 teachers create engaging learning environments that foster curiosity, skill acquisition, and a love for learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019; Department of Education Philippines, 2018).

3.1.1. Emphasized Phonics and Reading Instruction—Grade 1 teachers prioritize phonics and reading instruction to develop early literacy skills. They employ systematic phonics instruction, sight word recognition activities, and guided reading sessions to enhance students' decoding, fluency, and comprehension, laying the foundation for proficient reading (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). This assertion is well-supported by extensive educational research. Phonics instruction, which emphasizes the relationship between letters and sounds, is critical for developing decoding skills, enabling students to read unfamiliar words (National et al., 2020). Sight word recognition helps students to quickly identify common words without needing to decode them, which enhances reading fluency (Ehri, 2014). Guided reading, a strategy where teachers provide targeted support to small groups of students based on their reading levels, further develops reading comprehension and fluency by allowing for differentiated instruction tailored to each student's needs (Fountas Pinnell, 2017). These elements create a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction essential for reading proficiency, laying a strong foundation for academic success. Em-

phasizing phonics and reading instruction is a critical experience for grade 1 teachers when teaching at the starting line. These teachers recognize the fundamental role that phonics and reading skills play in early literacy development. They understand that a strong foundation in phonics, including letter-sound correspondence and decoding skills, is essential for students to become fluent and confident readers (National Reading Panel, 2020). By emphasizing phonics and reading instruction, grade 1 teachers equip their students with the necessary tools to unlock the world of written language. Grade 1 teachers employ various strategies to teach phonics and reading effectively. They use explicit and systematic approaches that introduce letter-sound relationships, phonemic awareness, and blending skills in a structured and sequential manner. Through engaging activities, such as phonics games, word-building exercises, and guided reading sessions, grade 1 teachers provide students with ample opportunities to practice and apply their phonics knowledge (Moats, 2019). By incorporating a balanced approach that combines phonics instruction with meaningful reading experiences, grade 1 teachers nurture students' reading fluency, comprehension, and overall literacy development. This pedagogical belief aligns with contemporary educational research emphasizing the significance of active learning and meaningful engagement in the learning process. Active learning approaches, where students participate in hands-on activities, discussions, and collaborative projects, have been shown to enhance student motivation, deepen understanding, and improve retention of information (Freeman et al., 2014). Engaging activities not only capture students' interest but also provide opportunities for them to apply knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and construct their own understanding of the content (Bonwell Eison, 1991). By creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment, teachers foster a culture of inquiry,

exploration, and discovery, resulting in more profound and enduring learning experiences for their students. Furthermore, grade 1 teachers create a print-rich environment that exposes students to a wide range of age-appropriate texts and literature. They provide access to a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction, to stimulate students' interest and curiosity in reading. Grade 1 teachers model fluent reading, engage in shared reading experiences, and encourage independent reading activities (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022). By immersing students in a literacy-rich environment and fostering a love for reading, grade 1 teachers cultivate lifelong readers who are motivated and enthusiastic about exploring the written word. Research consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of phonics-based instruction in developing early reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2020). It has improved decoding abilities, word recognition, spelling, and overall reading comprehension. Additionally, a balanced approach that combines phonics instruction with meaningful reading experiences is most effective in promoting literacy growth (Moats, 2019).

3.1.2. Bridging Home and School Culture—Grade 1 teachers actively bridge the gap between home and school culture. They involve parents and the community in the learning process through parent-teacher collaborations, home-based activities, and cultural events celebrating local traditions and customs (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). That statement was supported by the recent research by O'Connor and McCartney (2018), which emphasizes the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in fostering a supportive learning environment, particularly in the early grades. By establishing a warm and welcoming classroom culture, teachers can enhance students' social-emotional well-being and academic achievement (Hughes et al., 2019). Additionally, studies by Rimm-Kaufman et al.

(2018) highlight the significance of peer interactions in shaping students' sense of belonging and connectedness within the school community. Through collaborative activities and relationship-building strategies, Grade 1 teachers cultivate a sense of family among their students, reinforcing the idea that every child is a valued member of the educational community. Grade 1 teachers actively bridge the gap between home and school culture. They involve parents and the community in the learning process through parent-teacher collaborations, home-based activities, and cultural events celebrating local traditions and customs (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). That statement was supported by the recent research by O'Connor and McCartney (2018), which emphasizes the importance of positive teacher-student relationships in fostering a supportive learning environment, particularly in the early grades. By establishing a warm and welcoming classroom culture, teachers can enhance students' social-emotional well-being and academic achievement (Hughes et al., 2019). Additionally, studies by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2018) highlight the significance of peer interactions in shaping students' sense of belonging and connectedness within the school community. Through collaborative activities and relationship-building strategies, Grade 1 teachers cultivate a sense of family among their students, reinforcing the idea that every child is a valued member of the educational community. By bridging home and school culture, grade 1 teachers foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment for their young learners. In addition, grade 1 teachers engage in various strategies in bridge home and school culture. They encourage parents and families to participate actively in their child's education by inviting them to share their cultural practices, traditions, and stories. This involvement can take the form of family presentations, cultural festivals, or even hosting community events at the school. By

incorporating diverse perspectives and promoting cultural exchange, grade 1 teachers create a classroom environment that values and respects the cultural backgrounds of all students (Epstein, 2021). Moreover, grade 1 teacher adapt instructional materials and activities to reflect the cultural diversity present in their classrooms. They incorporate multicultural literature, artifacts, and visuals that represent different ethnicities, languages, and customs. These materials expose students to a broader range of cultural experiences and promote cultural appreciation and understanding among classmates. By integrating cultural elements into their teaching, grade 1 teachers foster a sense of pride in students' identities while cultivating empathy and respect for others (Banks, 2019).

3.1.3. Use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education—Grade 1 teachers implemented Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) to provide a strong foundation in students' first language while gradually introducing Filipino and English. They utilize culturally relevant materials, integrate local language instruction, and promote language development and literacy skills in multiple languages (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). That statement was supported by the recent research by Geertsema et al. (2020), which underscores the importance of MTB-MLE in fostering linguistic development and academic achievement among young learners. MTB-MLE promotes a strong linguistic foundation that facilitates language acquisition and comprehension by providing instruction in students' first language while gradually introducing additional languages, such as the national language or English (Lindholm-Leary Borsato, 2016). Moreover, studies by Benson et al. (2018) highlight the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, including enhanced problem-solving skills, metalinguistic awareness, and academic performance. Through MTB-MLE, Grade 1 teachers honor students' cultural and linguistic her-

itage and prepare them for success in navigating a bilingual curriculum and thriving academically in subsequent grades." The use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is a significant experience for grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line. MTB-MLE is an approach that recognizes the importance of using students' first language or mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of education. It allows students to develop a strong foundation in their first language while gradually introducing other languages, such as the national language or English (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). By employing MTB-MLE, grade 1 teachers create a supportive learning environment that promotes language development, academic achievement, and cultural pride. In the Philippines, grade 1 teachers utilize MTB-MLE to facilitate effective student communication and comprehension. By using students' mother tongue as the language of instruction, teachers ensure that students fully grasp the concepts being taught, thus laying a solid foundation for future learning (Palomares et al., 2017). This approach enables students to engage more actively in classroom activities, express themselves confidently, and build a strong understanding of academic content. Recent research by Cummins (2019) supports and emphasizes the importance of linguistic diversity in education and highlights the positive impact of incorporating students' first languages in the learning process. By leveraging students' mother tongues, teachers validate their cultural identities and create a sense of belonging and affirmation (García Kleifgen, 2018). Moreover, studies by García (2019) underscore the cognitive and academic benefits of multilingualism, including improved cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and academic achievement. Through embracing linguistic diversity in the classroom, teachers not only promote equity and social justice but also facilitate deeper understanding and meaningful learning experi-

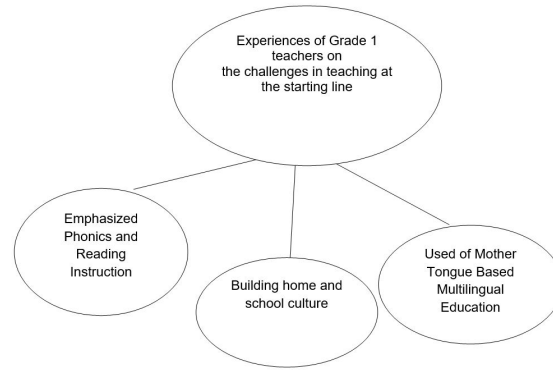


Fig. 3. The emerging themes on the experiences of Grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line

ences for all students.” MTB-MLE also helps preserve and promote students’ cultural heritage. By incorporating local languages into the curriculum, grade 1 teachers validate the linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. This validation fosters students’ sense of identity and belonging, promoting cultural appreciation and respect (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). The use of their mother tongue is a way of preserving the cultural heritage of their respective tribes. Students connect with their roots through the language, stories, and traditions of their families and native roots. Mother tongue languages play a crucial role in shaping an individual’s cultural identity and personal development. They are the first language that children learn, and they are closely tied to family,

community, and cultural traditions. There are key advantages of MTB MLE schools for children: students can develop foundational literacy and communication skills in a language they are familiar with, which allows them to participate more fully in the classroom and gain confidence amongst their peers at a critical stage in their development. Additionally, research has shown that MTB-MLE can enhance students’ cognitive development, academic achievement, and overall school performance (Benson et al., 2019). Figure 3 shows the experiences of grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line and the emergence of the three themes: emphasized phonics and reading instruction, building home and school culture and used of mother tongue-based multilingual education.

3.2. Coping Mechanisms of Grade 1 Teachers on the Challenges in Teaching at the Starting Line—Coping with the challenges of teaching at the starting line is an essential aspect of the experiences of grade 1 teachers. These dedicated educators encounter a wide range of hurdles, including classroom management, adapting to diverse learning needs, and addressing young learners’ academic and socio-emotional development. To navigate these challenges effectively, grade 1 teachers employ various coping mechanisms to maintain their well-being, enhance their teaching practice, and cre-

ate a positive learning environment for their students (Akhtar, 2020).

3.2.1. Utilizing classroom management strategies—Grade 1 teachers employ effective classroom management strategies that create a positive and organized learning environment. They establish clear expectations, implement behavior management techniques, and provide structured routines to promote student engagement and minimize disruptions (Marzano Marzano, 2008). By effectively managing the classroom, grade 1 teachers establish a conducive learning atmosphere for their students.

The statement of the participant was supported by the research of Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2018), which emphasizes the importance of predictable classroom routines in fostering a positive learning environment and reducing students' anxiety. From morning circle time to end-of-the-day procedures, these rituals provide students with a sense of security and consistency, allowing them to transition smoothly between activities and tasks (Marzano Marzano, 2023). Moreover, studies by Hughes et al. (2019) highlight the role of classroom rituals in building a sense of community and connection among students and teachers. By establishing and maintaining daily routines, educators create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed academically. Utilizing effective classroom management strategies is a critical coping mechanism for grade 1 teachers as they navigate the challenges of teaching at the starting line. These teachers understand the importance of creating a structured and positive learning environment to promote student engagement and behavior management. They establish clear expectations, rules, and routines in their classrooms to provide students with a sense of predictability and structure (Marzano Marzano, 2019). By implementing consistent and fair classroom management strategies, grade 1 teacher can prevent disruptions, foster a sense of community, and create an optimal learning environment for their students. Research by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2018) underscores the importance of predictable routines and structures in creating a conducive learning environment. When students know what to expect each day, they experience reduced anxiety and uncertainty, allowing them to focus more effectively on their learning tasks (Marzano Marzano, 2023). Moreover, studies by Hughes et al. (2019) highlight the role of consistency in promoting a sense of stability and belonging among students. By maintaining consistent daily activities, educa-

tors provide students with a sense of security and familiarity, enabling them to develop a positive attitude towards learning and engage more actively in classroom activities (Johnson et al., 2021). In addition to establishing expectations and routines, grade 1 teachers employ proactive strategies to address behavior challenges and maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. They use various techniques, such as positive reinforcement, praise, and rewards, to acknowledge and encourage desired behaviors (Sprick, 2019). Grade 1 teachers actively build relationships with their students, taking the time to understand their individual needs, interests, and motivations. This personalized approach allows teachers to tailor their classroom management strategies to effectively address specific challenges and support student growth and development. Professional development and continuous learning are crucial in supporting grade 1 teachers in utilizing effective classroom management strategies. These teachers actively seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills in behavior management and classroom organization. They participate in workshops, conferences, and online courses focused on evidence-based strategies and best practices in classroom management (Lewis et al., 2019). By staying abreast of the latest research and engaging in ongoing professional development, grade 1 teacher can continually refine their classroom management techniques, adapt to changing student needs, and confidently address the challenges they encounter in their classrooms.

3.2.2. *Seeking social support*—Grade 1 teachers recognize the importance of seeking support from their colleagues, administrators, and other professionals in the field. They engage in collaborative problem-solving, share experiences, and seek advice to enhance their teaching practice (Akhtar, 2020). This social support network provides a valuable platform for emotional support, professional growth, and the exchange of effective teaching strategies.

The research of Akhtar (2020) emphasizes the significance of collaborative learning communities in enhancing teacher effectiveness and instructional practices. By participating in workshops, attending conferences, and joining teacher communities, educators gain access to valuable insights, resources, and best practices (Hill et al., 2018). Moreover, studies by Ingersoll and Strong (2021) highlight the positive impact of professional networking on teacher morale, job satisfaction, and retention. Through interaction with peers and mentors, Grade 1 teachers expand their knowledge base, receive feedback on their teaching practices, and build supportive relationships that contribute to their success in the classroom. Seeking social support is a vital coping mechanism for grade 1 teachers as they navigate the challenges of teaching at the starting line. These teachers recognize the importance of building a strong support network, both within the school community and beyond. They actively seek out opportunities to connect with colleagues, participate in professional learning communities, and engage in collaborative discussions to share experiences, seek advice, and gather support (Hill et al., 2018). By seeking social support, grade 1 teachers gain a sense of belonging, validation, and the knowledge that they are not alone in facing the challenges they encounter in their classrooms. The research of Epstein (2021) underscores the importance of school-community partnerships in enhancing the educational experience and fostering student success. By collaborating with local businesses, organizations, and community members, Grade 1 teachers enrich the learning experience by providing students with real-world connections and opportunities for authentic learning (Bartlett Johnson, 2019). These partnerships facilitate hands-on learning experiences, guest speakers, and field trips that broaden students' horizons and deepen their understanding of the world around them. Moreover, studies by Mapp and Kuttner (2017)

highlight the positive impact of community involvement on student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. By engaging with the broader community, Grade 1 teachers create a dynamic and enriching educational environment that prepares students for success in school and beyond. In addition to seeking support within the school community, grade 1 teacher also value the importance of seeking support from family, friends, and other external sources. They engage in open and honest conversations with their loved ones about their classroom experiences, challenges, and successes. Grade 1 teachers understand that sharing their thoughts and feelings with trusted individuals helps alleviate stress, provides a fresh perspective and offers emotional support (Katz, 2019). By seeking social support beyond the school setting, grade 1 teachers establish a support system that nurtures their well-being and resilience. Professional development opportunities and mentorship programs play a crucial role in providing social support to grade 1 teacher. These teachers actively engage in professional development workshops, conferences, and seminars to expand their knowledge, enhance their teaching practices, and connect with like-minded educators (Ingersoll Strong, 2021). They also value mentorship programs where experienced teachers provide guidance, share insights, and offer support to novice grade 1 teachers. By participating in such programs, grade 1 teachers benefit from the wisdom and expertise of their peers, ultimately fostering a sense of professional growth and camaraderie.

3.2.3. Managing time effectively—Grade 1 teachers understand the significance of managing time effectively in handling the demands of teaching at the starting line. They develop strategies to prioritize tasks, organize instructional materials, and plan engaging activities within a limited time. By efficiently managing their time, grade 1 teachers reduce stress, increase productivity and ensure that they meet

the diverse needs of their students (Pelsma Lowery, 2021). Research by Pelsma and Lowery (2021) emphasizes the impact of time management on teacher workload and job satisfaction. Effective time management strategies enable educators to prioritize tasks, allocate resources efficiently, and meet the diverse needs of their students (Smithey Brown, 2018). By managing time well, teachers can reduce stress, increase productivity, and ensure they fulfill their professional responsibilities effectively (Hoffman, 2020). Moreover, studies by Johnson and Pasnak (2020) highlight the positive correlation between teacher time management skills and student outcomes. When teachers manage their time effectively, they create a structured and conducive learning environment that promotes student engagement and academic success. Managing time effectively is a vital coping mechanism for grade 1 teachers as they navigate the challenges of teaching at the starting line. These teachers understand the importance of organizing their time efficiently to optimize productivity and minimize stress. They employ time-blocking and prioritization strategies to allocate specific time slots for different activities, including lesson planning, instructional delivery, student assessments, and administrative tasks (Hoffman, 2020). By setting clear goals, creating structured schedules, and adhering to predetermined time blocks, grade 1 teachers maximized their instructional time, ensured all essential tasks were completed, and maintained control over their workload. Here is the statement about managing time effectively. In addition to time blocking, grade 1 teachers streamline their tasks and eliminate time-wasting activities. They recognize the value of identifying

and focusing on high-priority tasks directly contributing to student learning outcomes. They prioritize their responsibilities and ensure that essential instructional activities precede less critical tasks. Grade 1 teachers leverage technology tools and resources to automate routine administrative duties, such as grading, record keeping, and communication with parents (Smithey Brown, 2018). By harnessing the power of educational apps, digital grade books, and online communication platforms, grade 1 teachers save valuable time and redirect their focus toward planning engaging lessons and providing individualized support to their students. Here is the additional statement about managing time effectively. Furthermore, collaborative planning and resource sharing are critical aspects of effective time management for grade 1 teachers. They collaborate professionally with their colleagues to share ideas, resources, and best practices. Grade 1 teachers participate in grade-level team meetings, subject-specific discussions, and professional learning communities to exchange insights, divide the workload, and support one another in lesson planning and curriculum development (Akhtar, 2020). By collaborating with their peers, grade 1 teachers tap into a collective pool of knowledge, leverage shared resources, and benefit from diverse perspectives. This collaborative approach saves time and fosters a supportive and enriching professional environment. Figure 4 shows the coping mechanisms of Grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line and the emergence of the three themes: Utilizing classroom management strategies, seeking social support and excessive administrative tasks, and Managing time effectively.

3.3. *Insights Learned from the Experiences of the Informants—*

3.3.1. *Engaging in self-care practices—* Grade 1 teachers prioritize their well-being by

engaging in self-care practices. They recognize the significance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, practicing relaxation techniques, and pursuing hobbies or activities that rejuvenate

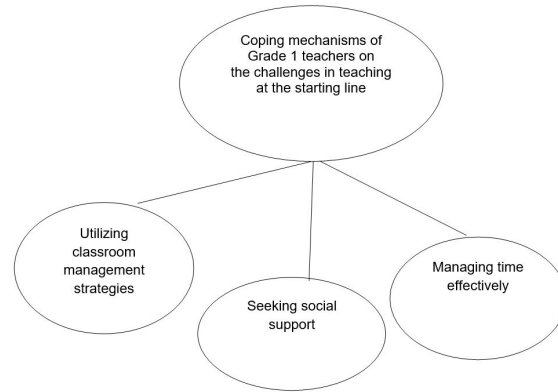


Fig. 4. The emerging themes on the coping mechanisms of Grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line

nate them (Pelsma Lowery, 2021). By caring for their physical and mental health, grade 1 teachers effectively manage stress, prevent burnout and maintain their enthusiasm and passion for teaching. Self-care is essential, as is the importance of a healthy diet, getting adequate rest, exercising, and finding outlets to de-stress. If students can take care of these basic needs, they will have more energy and focus to stay engaged and better position themselves for success. Engaging in self-care practices is a crucial coping mechanism for grade 1 teachers as they navigate the demands and challenges of teaching at the starting line. These teachers understand the importance of caring for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being to sustain their effectiveness in the classroom. They prioritize self-care activities such as regular exercise, adequate sleep, and healthy eating habits (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2020). By nurturing their own well-being, grade 1 teacher maintain their energy levels, manage stress, and approach their teaching responsibilities with a positive mindset. Here is the statement of engaging in self-care practices. In addition to physical self-care, grade 1 teachers prioritize their mental and emotional well-being. They engage in activities that help them relax, recharge, and manage stress. This may include practicing mindfulness and meditation techniques, engaging in hobbies and interests outside of teaching, or

seeking support from colleagues or professional networks (Harris, 2019). Grade 1 teachers recognize that by attending to their own mental and emotional needs, they are better equipped to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for their students. Statement of the Engaging in self-care practices. Establishing boundaries and maintaining a healthy work-life balance is another critical aspect of self-care for grade 1 teachers. They set realistic expectations for themselves and avoid overextending their commitments. Grade 1 teachers allocate time for personal activities, hobbies, and spending quality time with their loved ones (Brown et al., 2017). By maintaining a healthy work-life balance, grade 1 teacher prevent burnout, maintain their passion for teaching, and sustain their motivation to provide the best learning experiences for their students.

3.3.2. *Welcoming Parental Involvement and Support*—Grade 1 teachers actively involve parents in their child’s education. They establish open lines of communication, conduct parent-teacher conferences, and provide regular updates on students’ progress. They also encourage parents to engage in activities that support their child’s learning at home, fostering a strong partnership between home and school (Department of Education Philippines, 2018). In teaching at the starting line, welcoming parental involvement and support is a key experience for

grade 1 teachers. These teachers recognize parents' invaluable role in their child's education and strive to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that encourages active parental participation. By fostering strong partnerships between home and school, grade 1 teachers ensure that parents feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute to their child's learning journey (Epstein, 2021). Grade 1 teachers actively promote parental involvement by establishing open lines of communication and creating opportunities for parents to engage in their child's education. They organize regular parent-teacher conferences, orientation sessions, and workshops to inform parents about the curriculum, classroom expectations, and strategies to support their child's learning (Deslandes Bertrand, 2019). By welcoming parents into the educational process, grade 1 teachers build trust, strengthen relationships and promote a collaborative approach to their child's development. Moreover, grade 1 teachers embrace the diverse perspectives and talents that parents bring to the classroom. They recognize that parents know uniquely about their child's interests, strengths, and learning styles. Grade 1 teachers actively seek parental input and involve them in decision-making processes related to their child's education. By valuing the expertise of parents and encouraging their active participation, grade 1 teachers create a sense of shared responsibility and mutual respect, ultimately benefiting the overall educational experience of the students (Henderson Mapp, 2022). Research has consistently shown that welcoming parental involvement and support positively impacts students' academic achievement, attendance, and social-emotional development (Deslandes Bertrand, 2019). When parents are actively engaged, students exhibit higher motivation levels, self-esteem, and overall well-being. Additionally, welcoming parental involvement contributes to a positive school climate, fosters a sense of community, and enhances overall

student success (Epstein, 2021). The above statement supports how parents' involvement in their children's learning process also benefits them: They better understand their children's emotional and intellectual needs. They gain confidence in their parenting capabilities. The parent learns their children's development stages and how to use positive reinforcement for each stage.

3.3.3. *Cultivating love for learning*—Educational insights from Grade 1 teachers regarding cultivating a love for learning often highlight the significance of creating a positive classroom environment. Piaget's theory of cognitive development underscores the importance of providing stimulating and age-appropriate activities, aligning with Grade 1 teachers' emphasis on playful learning experiences (Piaget, 2022). Incorporating play into the curriculum fosters a joyous atmosphere and supports cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for a positive attitude toward learning (Duncan et al., 2017). Educators emphasize the role of social interaction in the learning process. Grade 1 teachers often stress the value of collaborative learning activities, encouraging students to explore and discover together. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory posits that interaction with more knowledgeable peers enhances cognitive development (Vygotsky, 2008). By fostering a collaborative learning environment, Grade 1 teachers create a sense of shared discovery and a positive social context for learning. Moreover, Grade 1 teachers frequently integrate principles from Dweck's research on mindset into their insights. Insights often emphasize the significance of praising effort and embracing mistakes as opportunities for growth (Dweck, 2018). By fostering a growth mindset in young learners, teachers aim to shift the focus from fixed notions of intelligence to the belief that abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This approach contributes to a positive learning environment that encourages students to approach

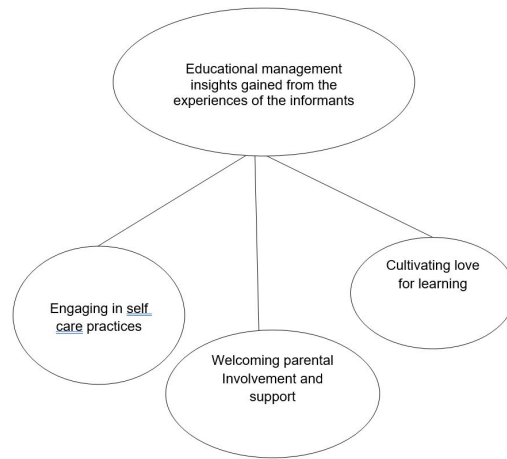


Fig. 5. Educational management insights gained from the experiences of the informants

challenges with resilience and a love for the learning journey. Additionally, Grade 1 teachers take a holistic approach to cultivating a love for learning, drawing on theories of cognitive development, sociocultural learning, intrinsic motivation, mindset, and family involvement. Educators aim to create an environment that

nurtures students’ natural curiosity and instills a positive attitude toward education. Figure 5 shows educational management insights gained from the informants’ experiences and the emergence of the three themes: engaging in self-care practices, welcoming parental involvement and support, and Cultivating love for learning.

4. Implications and Future Directions

In this chapter, the summary of the study were presented, and from the summary of the findings, the implications and future directions. The purpose of my study was to solicit the experiences of Grade 1 teachers on the challenges in teaching at the starting line in Panabo Central District, Division of Panabo. A qualitative phenomenological method was utilized with thematic analysis to achieve the research objectives. In adherence to Cresswell’s (2018) guidelines in open-ended questions for interviews were applied to get an authentic understanding of people’s experiences. Furthermore, this interview approach encouraged participants to present their own definition or meaning of the phenomenon being explored.

4.1. *Findings*—The study’s findings on the challenges of Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line were revealed as follows: bridged home and school culture, used mother-tongue-based multi-lingual education, and emphasized phonics and reading instruction. It was revealed that the Grade 1 teachers’ coping mechanisms for teaching at the starting line included utilizing classroom management strategies, seeking social support, and managing time effectively.

Regarding the educational management insights gained from the participants, the teachers suggested engaging in self-care practices, welcoming parental involvement and support, and cultivating a love for learning.

4.2. *Implications*—The results of my analysis revealed the following significant findings. Based on the experiences of Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line, the results of the interview revealed the following themes: First,

emphasized Phonics and Reading Instruction. Teachers prioritize phonics and reading instruction to develop early literacy skills. They employ systematic phonics instruction, sight word recognition activities, and guided reading sessions to enhance students' decoding, fluency, and comprehension, laying the foundation for proficient reading. Second, the use of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education. This approach recognizes the importance of using students' first language or mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of education. Third, Bridged Home and School Culture. Teachers encourage parents and families to participate actively in their children's education by inviting them to share their cultural practices, traditions, and stories. This involvement can be family presentations, cultural festivals, or even hosting community events at the school. One of the themes that was shown regarding the coping mechanisms of Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line was utilizing classroom management strategies. Effective classroom management strategies create a positive and organized learning environment. They establish clear expectations, implement behavior management techniques, and provide structured routines to promote student engagement and minimize disruptions. The second theme identified was seeking social support. Social support networks provide a valuable platform for emotional support, professional growth, and the exchange of effective teaching strategies. The third theme identified was managing time effectively. In managing time effectively, the teachers develop strategies to prioritize tasks, organize instructional materials, and plan engaging activities within the limited time. By efficiently managing their time, grade 1 teacher reduce stress, increase productivity, and ensure that they meet the diverse needs of their students. On the educational management insights the Grade 1 teachers gained in teaching at the starting line, the first theme identified was engag-

ing in self-care practices. Teachers recognized the significance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance, practicing relaxation techniques, and pursuing hobbies or activities that rejuvenate them. The second theme identified as was welcomed parental involvement and support. Teachers actively promote parental involvement by establishing open lines of communication and creating opportunities for parents to engage in their child's education. They organize regular parent-teacher conferences, orientation sessions, and workshops to provide parents with information about the curriculum, classroom expectations, and strategies to support their child's learning. The third theme was cultivating love for learning. Educators emphasized the role of social interaction in the learning process. The incorporation of play into the curriculum not only fosters a joyous atmosphere but also supports cognitive and social development, laying a foundation for a positive attitude toward learning.

4.2.1. Future Directions—Future research may investigate the long-term effects of Grade 1 teaching practices on students' overall academic success. This study might follow students who experienced specific instructional methods in Grade 1 to understand how these early experiences contribute to their later academic achievements. By identifying effective teaching strategies at the starting line of formal education, educators can tailor their approaches to foster a strong foundation for future learning. Secondly, considering the evolving landscape of educational technology, a future study may explore integrating digital tools in Grade 1 classrooms. This investigation might assess the impact of technology on student engagement, learning outcomes, and the development of essential 21st-century skills. Examining how technology can be effectively incorporated into early education can provide insights into optimizing the use of digital tools to enhance the learning experience for young students. Finally,

a valuable future direction for research could focus on the role of continuous professional development for Grade 1 teachers. Understanding how ongoing training and support contribute to effective teaching practices, particularly in the foundational years, could provide valuable insights for educational policymakers and institutions. This research could explore the specific needs of Grade 1 teachers, identify areas for growth, and suggest strategies to enhance their professional development, ultimately benefiting both educators and their students. These recommendations were offered based on the findings regarding the experiences, coping mechanisms, and educational management insights gained by Grade 1 teachers in teaching at the starting line. Firstly, it is crucial to promote cultural inclusivity and parental involvement. Grade 1 teachers should actively invite parents and families to participate in their child's education, encouraging them to share their cultural practices, traditions, and stories. This involvement can be family presentations, cultural festivals, or community events hosted at the school. Additionally, supporting mother tongue-based multilingual education was essential. Recognizing the importance of using students' first language or mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years can enhance learning outcomes and lay a strong foundation for language development. Secondly, it was vital to prioritize phonics and reading instruction for Grade 1 students. Teachers should focus on systematic phonics instruction, sight word recognition activities, and guided reading sessions to develop early literacy skills. By emphasizing these foundational skills, teachers can enhance students' decoding, fluency, and comprehension abilities, setting them up for future reading success. Furthermore, effective classroom management strategies are crucial. Grade 1 teachers should establish clear expectations, implement behavior management techniques, and provide structured routines to create a positive and organized learning environment. This promotes student engagement and minimizes disruptions, allowing for effective teaching and learning. These recommendations aim to support Grade 1 teachers in their important role, facilitate student success, and foster a positive and inclusive classroom environment. By implementing these strategies, teachers could create a nurturing and engaging learning environment that meets their students' diverse needs and promotes their overall development.

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