

Learning in Paulinian Community: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experiences of the MTAP National Scholars Batch 3

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ABSTRACT: The study looked into the challenges encountered by the MTAP national scholars and their significant learning while in the scholarship program. Through the results of the present study, the researchers crafted a compendium of best practices of the scholars that can be adopted by other teachers. The study utilized the qualitative research with phenomenology as an approach. The participants of the study consisted of 4 selected National MTAP scholars from the different regions in the Philippines who were chosen purposively. In gathering pertinent information, the researchers used an interview guide questions to direct the flow of discussions with the respondents during focus group discussion. The researchers prepared four questions for the respondents. Results of the study revealed that emotional problem is the greatest challenge encountered by the MTAP national scholars. It also revealed that despite the challenges encountered by these scholars they were able to handle and cope-up with these difficulties because of the friendship that they build while in the scholarship program. It is recommended that the department may send more teachers to scholarship program either local or international because it does not only help teachers to be more equipped with their subject matter, but it also enables teachers to be more compassionate in teaching.

KEYWORDS: lived experiences, MTAP scholars, phenomenological analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers play a very important role in the society. They are the greatest contributor in all forms of knowledge obtained by students. They shape and mold students to be a better person capable of facing the challenges of the present time. Teachers are indeed modern heroes of today's generation. As they are considered one of the most important ingredients in building the students' values and morale, they also need assistance for them to be the best teacher that they can. Given the importance of teachers to the Department of Education, the organization is also developing ways to assist teachers in becoming effective and efficient teachers and teachers who are fully fortified with values and attitudes worthy of emulation by students and other teachers. Not only does the department send teachers to seminars, but also local, national, and even international scholarship programs. The DepEd-MTAP Scholarship Graduate School Program in Secondary Mathematics is one of the scholarship programs offered by the department. Regional offices are requested to assist in selecting qualified scholars according to DepEd Memorandum No. 077 s. 2018. The MTAP scholarship covers educational expenses such as tuition and miscellaneous fees and thesis writing for qualified public secondary Mathematics teachers pursuing a Master of Arts in Curriculum Design Development and Supervision, Major in Mathematics (MACDDS) well as travel and lodging for the scholars. It is a collaborative effort with the St. Paul University of Manila. This scholarship program was designed to prepare mathematics teachers in grades 11 and 12 to teach the K-12 Basic Education Curriculum. Additionally, the MTAP organization's scholarship program is in collaboration with St. Paul University. This institution offers a diverse range of accredited graduate, undergraduate, and basic education programs. It maintains relationships on a national and international level with educational institutions, research organizations, alumni associations, and cause-related organizations. The institution was founded to improve the quality of Paulinian education by instituting curriculum reforms, training school leaders, and enhancing learning

and instruction (Ang, 2011). Since the MTAP scholars are affiliated with St. Paul University, it is assumed that they will be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to be more effective mathematics teachers and the necessary values to develop a more passionate teacher.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the lived experiences of the third batch of MTAP scholars. The researchers learned about the scholars' challenges and significant learning experiences while enrolled in the scholarship program. It also provided meaningful strategies that the scholars learned from their professors and can apply at their designated school.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study looked into the challenges encountered by the public secondary beginning teachers and how they deal or overcome it. Through the results of the present study, the researcher also crafted manual about Comprehensive Training Program for beginning teachers. The central question of the study is:

What is the essence of the lived experiences of the National MTAP scholars?

Specific Questions

1. How do the scholars describe their lived experiences as regards to the challenges and their significant learning while in the scholarship program?
2. What themes emerge from the testimonies shared by the scholars as to the challenges and their significant learning while in the scholarship program?

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study employed a qualitative approach based on phenomenology. This strategy is used when a researcher is "interested in elucidating relationships and patterns in gathered data in order to gain a more complete understanding of a phenomenon." This line of research is discovery-oriented, and the findings are not predetermined due to the absence of manipulated variables; instead, the design is emergent. The initial research questions and the procedures or protocols for data collection may change along the way, depending on what ongoing data collection and inductive data analysis reveal (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological approach is most appropriate for the study's objective: to explore and comprehend the lived experiences of National MTAP scholars regarding the challenges they encountered and the significant learning they gained while participating in the scholarship program. The phenomenological approach enabled participants to elicit their meaning for their experience of being new to the teaching profession through in-depth interviews. The researcher chose this method because the current study's primary objective is to increase awareness of a particular phenomenon rather than explicate the structure or essence of lived experiences, searching for meaning that identifies the phenomena's essence. Additionally, the study will shed light on the nature of human beings.

Respondents of the Study: The study involved 4 selected National MTAP scholars from various regions throughout the Philippines. The current study necessitated recruiting a relatively homogeneous group of participants whom participants have all encountered the same occurrence. The participants in this study have significant and meaningful experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. Throughout the research study, participants were provided with a code and assured of their anonymity.

Research Instrument: The researcher gathered pertinent information by directing the flow of discussions with respondents using interview guide questions. Four questions were prepared for the respondents by the researcher. These questions elicited reflections on the entire discussion and then solicited participants' positions or opinions on issues of critical importance to the researchers. The researcher used open-ended questions, which effectively engage participants. The following questions were included in the interview guide for the National MTAP scholars:

1. Can you share about the experiences you encountered while in the scholarship program.
2. What are the challenges you encountered while in the scholarship program?
3. What is your significant learning while in the scholarship program?

4. Can you share some of your best practices as a Math teacher which do you think very helpful to students and can be adopted by other teachers?

Before the actual interview, the key informant secured the environment to create a more comfortable and friendly atmosphere to foster trust and confidence among the participants. Additionally, because the researcher created the interview guide questions, they were validated. The researcher consulted four experts to validate the questions to ensure they were appropriate for the research and the participants. All the experts hold doctoral degrees and have a passion for conducting research, mainly qualitative research.

Data Gathering: Participants signed a letter of consent indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Following that, a Focus Group Discussion with the scholars was scheduled. Before conducting the interview, the researcher prepared guide questions, recording devices, and writing materials. Additionally, an assistant was requested to participate to transcribe the discussion. The recorded interviews were transcribed and reconciled with the written account. Following that, she encoded the verbatim transcription, tabulated the data, and analyzed the qualitative data to identify emerging themes. Additionally, in this phenomenological study, the primary data collection method is in-depth interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007). A phenomenological interview is used to elucidate the meaning of a phenomenon shared by several individuals. Similarly, multiple interviews with each of the research respondents were conducted (Creswell, 2007). To collect appropriate phenomenological data, the researcher conducted three serial in-depth phenomenological interviews with each respondent. The first interview assessed prior experience with the phenomenon of interest, while the second interview focused on recent experience. The third interview used information gleaned from the previous two to describe the individual's actual experience with the phenomenon. The researcher began with a social conversation to establish a comfortable and trusting environment. Focus group interviews, observations, and video recordings were used to collect data. In addition to the interview, the research environment was observed using an observation method. Additionally, data were gathered from a variety of informants for triangulation. The researcher adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in most research manuals. The researcher explained the significance and objectives of the study to the respondents. The respondents' confidentiality regarding the information they were to share or speak was protected. The authors of the literature and studies that were used to establish the rationale and background for the study and support the study's findings were properly cited.

Treatment of Qualitative Data: This study used a qualitative method known as theme-centered or category-based analysis. *Thematic analysis* is a term that refers to analysis that is focused on a specific theme. One of the advantages of this approach is its theoretical flexibility. Thematic analysis is accomplished using data coding. Coding is accomplished by combining data for themes, ideas, and categories and labeling similar text passages with a code label so they can be retrieved and compared at a later stage. Coding the data simplifies the process of searching for, comparing, and identifying any pattern (Alase, 2016). The following two coding processes will be used in this study: descriptive coding and interpretative coding. The phenomenological analysis began by bracketing the researcher's subjectivity, which refers to the study's preconceptions. This process begins with the researcher writing a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. Before beginning the data analysis, the researcher read the data's subjectivity statement, which included describing the researcher's encounter with the phenomena. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the data collected through the triangulation process. Additionally, the data were analyzed by obtaining narrative descriptions of observations, transcripts from taped interviews, entries in the researcher's diary reflecting on the setting's dynamics, and notes were taken while reading written documents. Additionally, the general procedures include preparing data for analysis, phenomenologically reducing the data, engaging in imaginative variation, and elucidating the experience's essence.

Trustworthiness : To persuade readers that the findings are worthwhile of consideration, this study may be evaluated according to the trustworthiness criteria described by Lincoln and Guba and cited by Heindel (2014). Qualitative researchers will benefit from posing four questions to themselves:

1. Truth value: How can one establish confidence in the "truth" of an inquiry's findings for the subjects (respondents) and the context in which the inquiry was conducted?

2. Applicability: How can one determine the extent to which an investigation's findings are applicable in other contexts or with other subjects (participants)?
3. Consistency: How can one determine whether an inquiry's findings would be replicated if conducted on the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?
4. Neutrality: How can one determine the extent to which an inquiry's findings are determined by the subjects (respondents) and circumstances of the inquiry, rather than by the inquirer's biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives? 290) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

III. RESULTS

The following concepts that were presented in the next few discussions provide the findings gathered through the focus-group discussion conducted with the participants on the four (4) interview questions.

Participants Description: The participants of this study were chosen purposefully. All of the participants were National MTAP scholars who suffice the qualification set by the Department of Education and Mathematics Teachers Association of the Philippines. The teachers were provided pseudonym identifiers for this study and promised anonymity throughout the research study.

Specific Question No.1. How do the scholars describe their lived experiences as regards to the challenges and their significant learning while in the scholarship program?

The annotated exemplars of the participants when asked regarding the challenges they encountered while in the scholarship program. Based on their testimonies, it shows that the challenges encountered by the participants are the distance from their families, schedule of their classes and conducting their thesis.

Some of the testimonies that support the claim are the responses of S1 and S2:

“Inside the MTAP house or the 11 months live-in scholarship program, there are difficulties and problems we encountered. The distance between you and your family. It is the most common among us since we are not use to it...”

“Being away from our families and loved ones is the most challenging part for me.”

“Since I am the only child, home sickness added to the burden that the MTAP people are expecting to us.”

Similarly, the responses of S3 and S4 also proved the difficulty they encountered in terms of class schedule.

“The schedule of our professor is one of the challenges while in the scholarship program. Since we are the ones to adjust on their schedule since teaching us is just their part-time job, we have to sleep sometimes in the morning since our schedule is 7 pm to 11:30 pm.”

“The schedule is very challenging...I am not use to that kind of schedule. It seems that we are call center agents.”

“The schedule of our professor is the greatest challenge we encounter here. We always need to anticipate for their availability.”

It implies that although the scholars are studying for free and they are not teaching for one year, they encountered challenges which cannot be suffice by the benefits obtained from the scholarship program. According to Guimba et al (2015), scholars encountered emotional problems, the participants whose families are in far provinces also frequently experience homesickness as a stressor. Irritation due to overcrowded dormitories, inadequate books in the library and slow internet connections were also experienced.

Specific Question No. 2. What themes emerge from the testimonies shared by the scholars as to the challenges and their significant learning while in the scholarship program?

The goal of the researcher in answering the research questions was to obtain a deeper understanding of the challenges and significant learning of the scholars while undergoing the said scholarship program. Knowing their experiences will enable other teachers to realize that despite the skills and knowledge that they have already still these scholars are learning new things more than what have just taught to them by their professors. These learning will enable other teachers to emulate the good values that they obtained from the scholarship program. Based on the thematic analysis, the superordinate theme that emerged is *emotional problem* and its subordinate themes are *distance from the family, away from family and home sickness*. These emerged from participants' testimonies

when asked regarding their experiences while in the scholarship program. On the other hand, when the participants were asked regarding the significant learning gained from the scholarship program, the superordinate theme is *companionship* and its subordinate themes are *value friendship*, *associate with others* and *gain friends*.

Result of the study implies that the scholars gained a very valuable learning while in the scholarship program. More than the additional knowledge that they have gained, it is very evident that the camaraderie that they build enable them to survive the one-year line-in scholarship program. According to Guimba (2015), some factors such as their good relationship with their peers, faith in God, proper mindset, motivation from their families, and self-confidence that they can overcome whatever trials that God put in their way. How they perceived the problems within their reach or way beyond their control is also a factor on how they can cope with problems they experienced. Nonetheless, it is concluded that both intrinsic (within) and extrinsic (outside) factors could contribute to the development of an individual.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that emotional problem is the greatest challenge encountered by the MTAP national scholars. Despite the challenges encountered by these scholars they were able to handle and cope-up with these difficulties because of the friendship that they build while in the scholarship program. It also shows that there is a need for the scholars to share their experiences to other teachers of their respective region and division because it can be a source of inspiration to other teachers because their story is worthy of emulation.

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