**Creating Learning Opportunities In Rural Class-Rooms:**

**Tales Of Grade Five (5) Teachers**

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**abstract**

Creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms is a paramount educational endeavor that seeks to address the distinctive challenges faced by students and teachers in remote and underserved areas. In a global context, the focus on rural education gains significance, as a significant portion of the world's population resides in rural regions, where education serves as a cornerstone for personal growth and community development. This study was conducted among Grade 5 teachers in five (5) rural elementary schools namely *New Murcia Elementary School, Marcos Sarona Elementary School, New Visayas Elementary School, Sinaragan Elementary School and Cabligan Elementary School*, all located in the Municipality of Matanao, Davao del Sur and under the supervision of the Department of Education (DepEd), Division of Davao del Sur. By utilizing the qualitative phenomenological method using thematic analysis, in-dept interviews alongside with the distribution of survey questionnaires which respondents meticulously answered was conducted. The findings of the research are categorized into three (3) areas namely *experiences, coping mechanisms* and *educational management.* Under experiences, three (3) common scenarios emerged namely engaging actively in advocacy effort, attendance to professional development and collaboration with parents and guardians. On the other hand, for coping mechanisms, the participants coped with balancing academic and emotional needs, cultivating growth mindset and advocating for policy change. As to educational management, it includes valuing parent-teacher collaboration, relevance of continuous professional development and significance of developed mindset.

**Keywords:** *Learning opportunities, experiences, coping mechanism, educational management, advocacy, professional development, collaboration*

1. **Introduction**

Grade five teachers worldwide create learning opportunities in rural classrooms through a complex and multifaceted undertaking. A multitude of strategies, ranging from innovative pedagogical approaches to community engagement, were employed to address the unique challenges faced in rural educational settings. Drawing from a global perspective, educators glean insights from diverse experiences, such as the collaborative strategies observed in remote regions (Smith & Brown, 2020), the role of technology in bridging gaps (Wang & Zhang, 2018), and the impact of local community involvement (Alexander & Lewis, 2019). These collective efforts aim to enrich the learning experiences of grade five students in rural classrooms, with lessons that informed a more equitable and effective educational practices worldwide.

A collection of research and study revealed that Grade five teachers in three (3) countries like *New Zealand, Hongkong and Japan* used different approaches in creating learning opportunities for their students residing in rural communities. For Grade five teachers in New Zealand, a holistic approach to create learning opportunities in rural classrooms, with a focus on fostering a strong sense of community and culturally responsive education was applied. Research by Williams (2021) highlights the significance of cultural inclusivity, incorporating Māori perspectives into the curriculum to honor the indigenous culture, and ensure all students feel represented and engaged.

Conversely, grade five teachers in Hong Kong employ innovative teaching methodologies and technology integration to create learning opportunities in rural classrooms. Research by Kwok and Lee (2020) emphasizes the use of blended learning, leveraging online resources and in-person instruction to make education more accessible and engaging for students in remote areas. Collaborative learning and peer mentoring also play a vital role in knowledge-sharing, fostering a sense of community and support within these classrooms. On the other hand, grade five teachers in Japan, particularly in rural areas, foster learning opportunities through a balanced approach that emphasizes community engagement, cultural relevance, and technology integration. Notably, the study by Suzuki and Tanaka (2018) highlights the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and local communities to provide students with a well-rounded education. These collaborative efforts not only enrich students' academic experiences but also instill a sense of belonging and purpose within the community.

In the Philippine setting, Grade five teachers employed a range of strategies to create learning opportunities in rural classrooms, adoptive to the unique challenges of their settings. The integration of culturally relevant and locally contextualized curriculum content is of prime importance such as incorporating indigenous knowledge and traditions into the education process to make the curriculum more relatable and engaging for students in rural areas, thus ensuring that learning aligns with their cultural backgrounds (Santos, 2017). Additionally, teachers collaborate with local communities to promote active engagement and community participation in the learning process thereby fostering a sense of collective responsibility for education and helps bridge the gap between the school and the community (Reyes, 2019).

Moreover, the use of technology, particularly mobile devices and internet connectivity, is becoming more prevalent in Filipino rural classrooms which helped overcome geographical limitations, hence making online resources more accessible to students in remote areas (Dela Cruz, 2018). Through these multifaceted approaches, grade five teachers in the Philippines are able to provide their students with a well-rounded education that is both culturally sensitive and technologically relevant, thus enhancing the learning experiences of students in rural classrooms.

Locally, for participating rural schools such as New Murcia Elementary School, Marcos Sarona Elementary School, New Visayas Elementary School, Sinaragan Elementary School and Cabligan Elementary School, all located in Matanao, Davao del Sur, under Matanao District I, grade five teachers encountered a variety of experiences in creating learning opportunities in the rural classrooms. It was in this context that this study was conceptualized to collect such experiences of the participants, as well as knowing their coping mechanisms and educational management style used. In creating learning opportunities, experiences are given much weigh which are categorized into three (3) factors such as active engagement in advocacy effort, professional development and parent-teacher collaboration.

*Active engagement in advocacy effort*. Educators are often at the forefront of advocating for resources, policy changes, and improved infrastructure to ensure that their students have access to quality education. The advocacy experiences of grade five teachers involve not only recognizing the unique needs of their students but also taking proactive steps to address these needs and create an environment conducive to learning.

*The relevance of continuous professional development*. Continuous professional development (CPD) emerges as a critical insight gained from the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. This insight underscores the importance of ongoing training, skill development and pedagogical innovations for educators as a means to overcome obstacles, enhance teaching practices, and better serve the diverse needs of students in rural areas.

*The* *value of parent-teacher collaboration*. Parent-teacher collaboration emerges as a pivotal insight gained from the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. This insight underscores the profound impact of this collaboration on students' academic progress, emotional well-being, and overall educational experience. The partnership between parents and grade five teachers reinforces the continuity of learning. Therefore, when parents actively engage with teachers, they become extensions of the learning environment. This collaboration ensures that what happens in school aligns with what transpires at home, creating a cohesive educational experience for students (Gomez & Hernandez, 2019).

Coping mechanisms are vital experiences of grade five teachers as they confront the myriad challenges in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms (Smith & Brown, 2019). Their ability to adapt and overcome these challenges directly impacts the quality of education and the personal growth of their students. Coping mechanism requires educators to stay informed about educational policies and legislative changes and actively engage in the democratic process by voting and participating in discussions about educational reforms (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004).

*Balancing Academic and Emotional Needs*. A fundamental aspect of this coping mechanism was cultivating a classroom environment that was conducive to emotional growth and learning. Thus, educators recognize that academic success was intrinsically linked to the emotional well-being of their students. The coping mechanism of balancing academic and emotional needs extends beyond the classroom, into extracurricular activities and community engagement. Grade five teachers encourage students to participate in activities that promote emotional well-being, such as sports, arts, and community service (Johnson & Martinez, 2020). These experiences provide opportunities for students to build self-esteem, resilience, and social connections that are essential for both emotional and academic growth.

*Cultivating a growth mindset*. One aspect of cultivating a growth mindset involves redefining failure. Grade five teachers work to create a classroom culture where mistakes are seen as opportunities for learning and growth rather than as indicators of inadequacy (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Students are encouraged to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, and view effort as a path to improvement.

*Advocating for policy change*. Advocating for policy change emerges as a vital coping mechanism of grade five teachers in navigating the challenges of creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. These dedicated educators recognize that systemic changes are often required to address the unique obstacles faced in rural education settings. Advocacy involves a multifaceted approach that encompasses local, regional, and national levels of government, as well as collaboration with education stakeholders. Furthermore, teachers collaborate with regional education organizations and advocacy groups to amplify their voices and create a unified front for policy change (Baldridge & Rodriguez, 2019). These partnerships allow for broader advocacy efforts and often result in increased visibility and support for the challenges faced by rural classrooms.

This research explores the experiences of grade five teachers, drawing upon their first-hand encounters, to illuminate the nuanced strategies, resilience, and adaptability that underpin their pedagogical journey in rural classrooms. By delving into these experiences, we can uncover lessons that use effective teaching practices, support the development of tailored policies, and ultimately enhance the quality of education in rural communities.

*The* *value of parent-teacher collaboration*. Parent-teacher collaboration emerges as a pivotal insight gained from the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. The partnership between parents and grade five teachers reinforces the continuity of learning. Therefore, when parents actively engage with teachers, they become extensions of the learning environment. This collaboration ensures that what happens in school aligns with what transpires at home, creating a cohesive educational experience for students (Gomez & Hernandez, 2019).

*The relevance of continuous professional development*. Continuous professional development (CPD) emerges as a critical insight gained from the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. In rural educational settings, where the challenges are often unique and resources limited, CPD holds immense relevance. This insight underscores the importance of ongoing training and skill development for educators as a means to overcome obstacles, enhance teaching practices, and better serve the diverse needs of students in rural areas. CPD is essential for staying updated with the latest teaching methods, educational technologies, and pedagogical innovations. Grade five teachers in rural classrooms often face the challenge of adapting to changing educational with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet these challenges (Doe & Smith, 2021). Whether it involves learning about new teaching techniques, utilizing technology effectively, or implementing inclusive educational practices, CPD ensures that educators are well-prepared.

*The significance of developed mindset*. A developed mindset, often referred to as a growth mindset, emerges as a significant insight gained from the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms. This insight underscores the profound importance of instilling in both students and educators the belief that intelligence, abilities, and skills can be developed through effort, learning, and resilience. Teachers play a pivotal role in promoting a developed mindset by providing students with the foundation to understand the connection between effort and achievement (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). By fostering the belief that intelligence and skills can be developed through effort, teachers empower students to take ownership of their learning and to view their education as a continuous journey.

This study is anchored on various theories namely Social Cognitive Theory developed by Albert Bandura in the 1960, Self-Determination Theory by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan in the 1980 and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory was rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky in 1920s and 1930. Primarily, this study is anchored on Social Cognitive Theory which emphasizes the role of observation, imitation, and modeling in the learning process. In the context of rural classrooms, grade five teachers' experiences can be explored through the lens of social cognitive theory, particularly in terms of how teachers model a growth mindset, how students learn by observing their teachers' perseverance and strategies for overcoming challenges, and how teachers motivate and shape students' beliefs about their own abilities.

Presented in Figure 1 is the relationship of the variables in the study. Based on the figure, there are three interconnected variables. These variables are the (1) experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms; (2) coping mechanisms of grade five teachers on the challenges in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms; and (3) Educational insights drawn from the experiences of the informants.

1. **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative approach to research specifically a phenomenological research design. Qualitative research involves measuring or counting things, often using surveys or experiments, to determine the relationships between variables and test hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). It also made used of coding, searching, reviewing themes, and writing-up. This study is conducted to determine the experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities for their students in the rural classrooms.

The respondents of the study were the five (5) grade five teachers from New Murcia Elementary School, Marcos Sarona Elementary School, New Visayas Elementary School, Sinaragan Elementary School and Cabligan Elementary School. The researcher utilized purposive sampling design in the study as respondent -teachers were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) must be in the service for at least five (5) years; (2) grade five teachers; and (3) experienced in creating learning opportunities.

The instruments which were used in the study were survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire is divided into two (2) parts. The first part referred to Demographic Profile of Grade five teachers which include questions on school, gender, marital status, age, number of years of service, subjects currently teaching and highest educational attainment. The second part is divided into three (3) items categorized as Learning Experiences, Coping Mechanisms and Educational Management. Learning Material, had three (3) sub-items, while under Coping Mechanisms, there were also three (3) sub-items and under Educational Management, there were also three (3) sub-items.

In analyzing the data gathered in the study, thematic analysis was utilized which involved a five-step process: (1) familiarization; (2) identifying thematic framework; (3) indexing; (4) charting; and (5) mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

1. **Results**

The data gathered revealed that in creating learning opportunities in rural classrooms, three (3) scenarios emerged under Learning Experiences Area which include active engagement in advocacy efforts, attendance to professional development and collaboration with parents and guardians. Respondent- teachers admitted that active engagement in advocacy efforts is usually geared towards sourcing out for additional funding resources to carry out projects in the school, such as the improvement of infrastructures. These two factors play crucial roles in helping provide quality education among students in rural areas. On the other hand, attendance to professional development such as seminars and trainings are vital in continuously providing avenue for teaching innovations which help respondent-teachers to be always updated in their craft. Conversely, the collaboration of parents and guardians with the teachers had provided assurance in the continuity of learning from school to home and the alignment of their goal in providing good education to the students.

In the aspect of coping mechanism, three (3) factors were disclosed which includes balancing academic and emotional needs of students, cultivating growth mindset and advocating for policy change. These three factors arise as leading mechanisms which respondent-teachers experienced.

Under educational management, three (3) factors also were also manifested by respondent-teachers such as the value of parents -teacher collaboration, relevance of continuous professional development (CPD) and significance of developed mindset which were shared commonly by the respondent-teachers.

1. **Discussions**

The experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities within rural classrooms are at the heart of an essential educational journey that uniquely intersects with geographic isolation, limited resources, and diverse student populations. These dedicated educators navigate challenges that demand innovative teaching strategies, community engagement, and a deep understanding of local contexts (Anderson, 2019).

 In this study, experiences of grade five teachers in creating learning opportunities within rural classroom was primarily influenced on their attendance to professional development and collaboration with parents and guardians. Respondent-teachers, no matter how long they have been in service as public school teachers, are still inspired and motivated to attend trainings and seminars provided by Dep Ed whenever there is an opportunity to do so. They believed that keeping abreast with the latest educational innovations, helps them in their professional growth and continuously improved their craft as educators. Moreover, in acknowledging the role of parents and guardians in the life of the students, the respondent -teachers are very open to collaborating with them and constantly sought their assistance in the different areas of learning such as reviewing of lessons, assignments and projects. Thus, an open communication with the parents is vital for them especially in monitoring the students’ attendance and performances in school.

On the other hand, as to active engagement of advocacy, the respondent-teachers revealed that usually such role is initially undertaken by the school head or principal in cooperation with the officers of Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) who are in the frontline of raising funds to support minor school projects such as *beautification, fencing etc*. As to matters involving major infrastructures and repairs of school facilities, such as buildings, the school head or principal normally bring its attention before the Dep Ed Division for funding or in some cases advocate it to the Local Government Unit (LGU) through the Local School Board (LSB). In this way, the necessity of a certain school project will be presented to the concerned authorities for appropriate action.

Notably, as this research also delves into the coping mechanisms employed by grade five teachers, topping the list is the balancing of academic and emotional needs. The encouragement of Grade five teachers has motivated students to join and participate on activities that promote emotional well-being, such as sports, arts, and community service which in the process allows them to build self-esteem, resilience, and social connections. Through these extra-curricular activities and participation in community activities, students are able to find an equilibrium between academic learnings and personal growth which is very important in giving them a holistic education. The second coping mechanism is cultivating of growth mindset which is a powerful one. The ability of the teachers to create a classroom culture where students are encouraged to embrace challenges and setbacks as not obstacles but rather a path to improvement is indeed a challenging task especially that they have different family backgrounds. However, the techniques used by Grade five teachers through giving constructive feedbacks and praising students for their efforts, strategies and progress are very effective. It helps students feel empowered to have more confidence in facing and overcoming challenges. Furthermore, telling one’s story as an educator when it comes to encountering personal difficulties in life is very impactful as students are able to relate to them which in the process cultivates growth mindset. This also develops empathy among students and instill growth mindset through attitude modelling and mirroring.

The last coping mechanism as revealed by Grade five teachers is advocating for policy change which is an extensive one as there is a need to collaborate with regional education organizations and advocacy groups in order to have a representation in the national level. Establishing partnerships among other educational groups increases visibility and support on the challenges faced by educators especially those from rural areas such as the participants of this study. The sharing of first-hand experiences draws a wider picture on the needs of educators in far flung areas on issues involving funding allocation, changing curriculum standards and providing teacher training programs best suited for rural set-ups. The utilization of social media in amplifying voices of educators from rural areas can be effective to ensure that the needs of rural learners are being considered in decision-making processes by the national leaders. This move together with organizing community meetings with parents and writing letters to policy makers is reflective that there is indeed a movement in the grassroot level for attainment of quality education.

In the aspect of educational management, the results which includes valuing of parent-teacher collaboration, relevance of continuous professional development (CPD) and significance of developed mindset are all interconnected with the items under learning experiences and coping mechanisms. Parent-teacher collaboration remains to be an invaluable asset which underscores its profound impact on students’ academic progress, emotional well-being and over-all educational experiences. This ensures that what happens in school aligns with what transpires at home thereby creating a cohesive educational experience for students which is beneficial for them. As to the relevance of CPD, it is of prime importance as it enhances teachers’ capacity to address unique needs of students in rural settings. The knowledge and strategies acquired through CPD, enables teachers to select the most appropriate mode of instruction which support best the students’ personal growth as learners considering the external factors they face as learners. Conversely, as to the significance of developed mindset, it serves as a reminder that a developed mind is a powerful tool for fostering resilience, adaptability and the pursuit of enhanced learning outcomes. This insight holds a particular relevance as students have varying levels of prior knowledge or experience and a mindset shift empowers them to persist in facing difficulties and challenges in life.

1. **Conclusions**

The present study recommends to Dep Ed officials and policy makers to come up with CPD[[1]](#footnote-1) programs which are tailored to promote professional growth befitting for educators assigned in rural areas and to allocate funds for installation of internet connectivity in order that educational resources online will be made readily available to students in spite of the challenges of geographical locations thereby enhancing technology integration in the curriculum. It is also recommended also for Dep Ed provincial offices (liked Dep Ed-Division of Davao del Sur) to conduct an inventory of school’s infrastructures and facilities, every (3) years to ensure the safety of students and teachers utilizing them and to assess what other structures and edifice which are needed to be repaired or built among schools within their division.

Furthermore, to ensure that collaboration of teachers-parents and guardians is strengthen, it is recommended through the Local Government Unit (LGU) in the barangay level where the rural schools are located to have a representation through the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) in the conduct of community activities which require the participation of the students. This will be beneficial to establish prompt coordination between communities and schools in carrying out projects , activities and programs intended for the growth of the students.

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1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)