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Research Article

Lived Experiences of Head Campers in Summer Camp

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ABSTRACT

Summer camps have proven effective in providing opportunities for social contact, personal development, and the improvement of the problem-solving and critical-thinking abilities of the students. However, significant findings about head campers' lived experiences in the field are scarce, especially in the Philippine context. To provide a groundwork of the phenomenon, this study delved into the head campers' lived experiences in preparation and implementation phases using the descriptive phenomenology of Husserl. At the same time, Colaizzi's seven-step method was used in thematic analysis. Individual guided interviews were utilized to gather participants' responses. Nine head campers who were active participants from the beginning up to the end of the program served as the participants of the study. Based on the participants' narratives, the following themes were generated: a) preparation phase: *triumphs in camaraderie, teachers are willing to learn new subject matter, time constraints in preparing the resources, and no ample time to review new subject matter;* b) implementation phase: *develop students' positive learning behavior, develop students' thinking skills, Students unable to master the fundamental knowledge, and teachers are struggling to integrate higher order thinking skills*. The findings implied that despite the sector and participants' efforts to make the program successful, there were still untoward instances that are beyond the program's expectations. Therefore, mentoring sessions and feed-backing activities all throughout the implementation must be strengthened and closely monitored by higher authorities so they can provide immediate and practical assistance for the head campers.

Keywords: *Descriptive phenomenology, Lived experiences, Preparation and implementation, Summer camp*

Introduction

In spite of the different academic initiatives for learning continuity amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, learners all over the world were still affected and experienced serious learning loss. In the Philippines, many reports have been published that the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the learning crisis in the educational system (Palatino, 2023; Hernando-Malipot, 2023; De Guzman, 2021; & CNN Philippines, 2019). The so-called dilemma brought the attention of different academic organizations and led to the great effort of implementing interventions like summer camp. A summer camp is an educational activity intended to give participants a controlled and engaging learning experience outside of the confines of the typical classroom. Summer camps might range in length, subject matter, and intended audience, but they share a common goal which is to promote positive growth and well-being of children and young people (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020).

Richmond et al. (2019) explained that summer camps are significant learning environments, and many of the benefits of going to camps persist into adulthood. Their participants claimed that the development of independence, persistence, responsibility, appreciation for diversity, and appreciation for the present were camp-related outcomes that were strongly attributable to their camp experiences and that these outcomes were also of high value in daily life. Moreover, summer camps develop young learners' relationship skills, self-confidence, self-identity, and technical skills (Wilson et al., 2019). Ideally, summer camp is beneficial for students in different aspects.

In addition, Aswad (2017) claimed that summer camp is effective in teaching English to students and it can be socially and psychologically beneficial to them. English camp makes students relax, creates a comfortable learning environment, creates a connection between campers, ignites campers' learning interest, and makes learning more enjoyable. In teaching Mathematics, summer camp is also significant to students, because findings show that students were all satisfied and enjoyed the whole conducted activities, and students expressed that Mathematics summer camp was indeed a fun way of learning (Md Noorani, 2010). More so, Leblebicioglu et al. (2017) also pointed out that summer camp applies to teaching scientific inquiry (IS) and the nature of science inquiry (NOSI). The study revealed that because of the summer camp, students' knowledge in Science was enhanced greatly in scientific investigations.

Overall, summer camp has great potential in addressing academic discrepancies in different learning facets. However, effective evaluation of any implementation is necessary to increase the ability of identifying and disseminating the best program practices (Duerden & Witt, 2012). The primary step in promoting summer learning is to bring awareness to a problem not really at the forefront of educational research or policy initiatives (Achelpohl, 2018). Indeed, it is essential to gather relevant information to back-up the implementation with realities. As evaluation findings can provide opportunities for how programs can be modified and enhanced (Rossi et al., 2004).

In the Philippines, summer camp is new and research findings are limited especially from the head campers' perspective. Therefore, the researchers would like to investigate head campers' lived experiences during the preparation and implementation phases of summer camp to provide a much-grounded understanding of the phenomenon. The research findings may shed light on the actual scenarios of preparation and implementation, and help corresponding authorities to make supplementary steps for program practices enhancement.

Domain of Inquiry

This study described head campers' lived experiences during the preparation and implementation of the summer camp.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative method using the descriptive phenomenological design in which the researchers asked about head campers' experiences in summer camp; specifically on the preparation and the implementation phases. The approach is based on the principles of Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, whose

ideology is the lived experience of individuals (Mananay et al., 2022). The data being collected were coded and themed using the 7 steps of Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method.

The participants were the nine (9) active head campers in one of the implementing organizations in Cebu, Philippines. The participants were chosen because they were in the program from the beginning up to the end of the implementation; moreover, these participants attended the orientation on how to implement the summer camp and maximize learning materials. Head campers who did not finish and only served days in the program were excluded even if they had attended the orientation to ensure that all participants were reliable enough to narrate their lived experiences all throughout the process. To understand the groundwork of analysis, this study utilized open-ended exploratory questions to extract head campers' experiences.

Consent forms were given to the participants for their noteworthy participation in the data collection process. Following the ethical considerations, the researchers maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' information. Participants were also informed that their participation is voluntary and no monetary involved.

Results and Discussions
This part presents the generated themes based on the extracts gathered from the participants. The following are the prevalent themes: a) during the preparation: *triumphs in camaraderie, teachers are willing to learn new subject matter, time constraints in preparing the resources, no ample time to review new subject matter;* b) during the implementation: *develop students' positive learning behavior, develop students' thinking skills, students' unable to master the fundamental knowledge, and teachers are struggling to integrate higher order thinking skills.*

1. Preparation Phase
In any educational program implementation, preparation is vital, since preparation is one of the important aspects of being an effective teacher (Ecole Global International Girls'

School, 2021). Teachers will be more capable to use the curriculum when there is an actual demonstration and enough time to apply the learned concepts (Penuel et al., 2007 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2018). Ideally, head campers must have ample time to prepare everything like equipping themselves with knowledge and skills, and getting ready all the resources needed. Because, if not, they may find the program a challenging one. Below are the prevalent themes being generated on the head campers' lived experiences during the preparation stage.

Theme 1: Triumphs in Camaraderie
Triumph is a term used to describe a total victory or success, especially one obtained after significant challenges, making the outcome exceptionally fulfilling (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Based on the head campers' responses, success stories have been tracked despite the uncertainties they have encountered throughout the process because of camaraderie. The discoveries can be a great note for next batches on how they can uphold an optimistic point of view on the program.

Extracts revealed that despite the abrupt implementation of the summer camp, head campers managed to convince enough participants to join the camp. Also, they manage to prepare all the learning materials because of camaraderie. They shared:

"…we are very much happy that we have more number of students nga ni join sa summer camp actually this is the best time for us head campers to witness asa dapita ang weakness sa mga bata…(T3)" (T3 said that they are very happy because they have convinced more students to join the summer camp. T3 added that summer camp is the best time for head campers to know the weaknesses of the students.)

"…I were amazed because we have encouraged a lot of campers and there were 15 head campers who volunteered…(T9)"

"...nindot siya kay ang mga head campers nagtinabangay gyud... (T5)" (T5 said that summer camp is nice because the head campers are really helping one another.)

"...despite sa kagamay sa oras head campers were able to prepare learning kit and powerpoint presentation kay nagtina-bangay...(T9)" (T9 said that despite the limited time, head campers were able to prepare the learning kit and the Power-Point presentations they needed because they were working together.)

It only shows that the quality of coopera-tion in implementing the summer camp brings a positive outcome in preparing the learning resources. In spite of the time constraint, head campers managed to fulfill their duties and re-sponsibilities.

Theme 2: Teachers are willing to Learn New Subject Matter

Moreover, one head camper emphasized that the preparation for summer camp serves as her review time to improve her knowledge in Mathematics even though she hated the sub-ject during her college years. As she said:

"...I've learned a lot. It gives me further insights about the subject. In fact, before, when I was a college student I was really afraid about Math... (T4)"

Head campers who are open and willing to learn new subjects can teach them. More so, this willingness can help head campers to en-rich his/her knowledge on the other subjects.

Theme 3: Time Constraint in Preparing the Resources

On the other hand, when implementing an intervention for the first time, the preparation stage might be one of the challenging tasks for head campers especially if they do not have am-ple time to prepare. Though there were success stories during the preparation phase there were still participants who experienced diffi-culties as they had diverse backgrounds and handled varied responsibilities. To achieve the

desired goals of a program, Park and So (2014) suggest that head campers' development and advancement, and the availability of quality re-sources must be observed.

However, during the event, head campers' preparation and the availability of quality ma-terials were less emphasized. Participants said that having the information late, and delayed learning materials solidify the preparation pro-cess. Consequently, they need to rush every-thing just to comply with the demands. Tran-scripts from the interview are shown below:

"kalit kaayo siya natinga gani ko nga naa dayon mag summer camp better sa gyud to nga naka start tag kuan (prepare) days ahead (T7)" (T7 was shocked be-cause of the abrupt implementation. She suggests that summer might be better if they have days ahead to prepare.)

"Ang mga materials late na kaayo ang uban nga kanang kuan dinalian kaayo siya makaingon ko nga ang preparation dili kaayo siya enough kay ang time kay murag kalit-kalit bitaw siya nga kuan kay nag orientation run niya nag implement dayon (T8)" (According to T8, the materi-als had arrived late, and the process was instant because they needed to start the program a day after the orientation. The given time was not enough.)

"delay ang information kay head campers were not oriented/informed ahead of time (T9)" (T9 said that the in-formation was delayed, and orientations were not ahead of time.)

For a program to be implemented smoothly, ample time is essential for the partic-ipants to prepare everything. Considering that the implementation is new, there are plenty of things to work on such as preparing the mate-rials for the students and reviewing the lessons.

Theme 4: No Ample Time to Review New Subject Matter

One participant also expressed that han-dling a subject that is out of her specialization is a challenging one because it requires enough

time to review the lessons. According to Co et al. (2021) teachers who are teaching outside specialization can experience difficulties, challenges, and negligence. However, when they are to see the curriculum and have had time to practice it they become adept at teaching the concepts (Penuel et al., 2007 as cited in Schwartz et al., 2018). The transcript from the interview is shown below:

"...for me it is a big challenge kay dijud ko Math teacher kay need og enough time mag review (T4)" (T4 said that it is a big challenge for her to teach Mathematics because that is not her expertise so she needs enough time to review.)

Although head campers are willing to learn and teach subjects that are beyond their specialization they still need ample time to review the lessons. This ample time is a great help for them to internalize concepts.

2. Implementation
Implementation is an activity that is planned and created to accomplish the activity's goal. It leads to activities, actions, or the development of a systematic process (Sofia, 2022). Implementation is therefore the action that follows the initial notion in order for something to happen. During the implementation of summer camp, participants have observed positive and negative learning behavior from the students. Presented in the succeeding paragraphs are the prevailing themes in the head campers' lived experiences during the implementation.

Theme 1: Develop Students' Positive Learning Behavior
The eagerness to learn more about the topics and uplifting one another were the positive behaviors being noted. According to the All4kids (2019), while having fun and pursuing their interests, children can develop their skills in learning, teamwork, problem-solving, knowledge, and self-awareness. The narratives of the participants show how students have improved their knowledge and skills and have developed the essence of teamwork. Transcripts from the interview are shown below:

"Ang kanindot niya actually ang mga bata kanang kuan ba mahuman bitaw gyud nila og paganswer ang ilang activity kay murag silag mag compete (positively) ba...based lang sa akoa mura silag mag compete pero katong mga hinay gyud kay ilang tabangan... naa jud koy usa nga dili mo read ilang tabangan... (T1)" (T1 said that what is nice about summer camp is that children can finish answering the activities because they compete positively. And even though they are competitive, they do not forget to help their classmates, especially the ones who can hardly read.)

"...na discover nako personally nga taas kaayo og gap ang mga bata niya dako kaayo silag apason tingali because of the pandemic for two years nga wala sila sa actual setting sa classroom pero makita gyud nimo sa mga bata nga naa jud silay eagerness...(T3)" (T3 discovered that there is a high learning gap among students maybe because of the two-year pandemic that they were not in the classrooms. Thus, she can see how eager the students are to learn.)

This implies that summer camp is significant to develop students' knowledge and skills. In contrast to the existing literature, summer camp develops not only students' knowledge and self-awareness, but also relationship skills.

Theme 2: Develop Students' Thinking Skills
Additionally, during assessments, some of the participants noticed significant improvements from the students. Head campers have observed that students' thinking skills are way better after joining the summer camp. Assessment is one of the salient parts of any form of teaching and learning the process. It is critical to any educational operation (Umar & Majeed, 2018). Through assessment, we can measure what individuals know and can do (Banta & Palomba, 2015). Hence, knowing how students perform during assessments is vital because it can help educators to visualize if the implemented program influenced students' knowledge.

"…nice kaayo ang summer camp run kay makat-on jud ang mga bata kay ma-pun-an ilang knowledge actually mura rajud siyag review sa ilang previous nga topics… (T5)" (T5 said that summer camp is nice because students are learning. Summer camp is more on a review of their previous lessons, T5 added.)

"…para nako okay raman sad siya kay ma develop manggyud ilang higher order thinking skills… (T7)" (T7 claimed that summer camp is really good because students' higher-order thinking skills were developed.)

Indeed, summer camp has the potential for creating a positive learning environment for the students in which they can enhance not only their knowledge about the concepts but also their interpersonal skills. The narratives implied that the approach of the summer camp enhanced students' higher order thinking skills.

Theme 3: Students' Unable to Master the Fundamental Knowledge

On the other, at the onset, head campers have also faced external conflicts related to students' behavior and prior knowledge. As mentioned by Flower et al. (2017), research suggests that teaching and learning are hampered by the fact that many teachers are not fully prepared for the kinds of behaviors that students may bring to the classroom.

Participants have a hard time on how they can get the trust and attention of the campers; and on how they can simplify the process and go back to the basic foundation of the lessons to reciprocate students' level of knowledge. According to Banerji et al. (2020), without the foundation, students may get left behind as they proceed to higher levels and are left out as they fail to clear terminal examinations. Transcripts from the interview show how challenging it is to teach students with a lack of basic knowledge.

"challenging kay gaaginud man sir oi ang mga bata manggud kuan man like imung pabarugon kay imung pa answeron

mupilit man ang lubot oi kay diman sila ready unya og imu sad silang pa answeron na mo deretso og because oi dili pajud sila ready sir kinahanglan pajud silang mas e nurture di pa sila ready musulat di paman gani sila kamao mo spelling og people di pajud halos tanan makabasa. (T2)" (T2 pointed out that it is a challenging task to teach students in summer camp because they lack confidence when you ask them to participate. They are not ready so they still need to be nurtured because sometimes they cannot even write or spell a word.)

"the children did not know how to do the multiplication, you need to go back to the basic operations (T4)"

"Prior competencies were not mastered such as the basic mathematical operations so most of the campers have difficulty in answering the activities (T9)"

"first namo nga meeting no ang mga bata mura pa silag hesitant bitaw kay dili manggud ako ilang teacher pag grade 8 niya ila teacher lain man (T5)" (T5 said that during their first meeting, students were hesitant because she was not the previous grade 8 teacher.)

Eventually, the fundamental skills and knowledge of the students in the different areas of discipline, which are supposed to be acquired during the primary stage, intervene in the process and the outcome of the program. Head campers have to go back to the discussion of the basic knowledge before they can proceed to the complex ones. The scenario prevents the head campers from going smoothly with activities.

Theme 4: Teachers are struggling to Integrate Higher Order Thinking Skills

Another significant observation of the participants in which they think campers find it challenging is the assessment. Head campers have noticed that not all students can cope with higher-order thinking skills questions. The phenomenon correlates to the reports of the

World Literacy Foundation (Chi, 2023), United Nations Children's Fund (Dela Pena, 2021), and Programme for International Student Assessment (Philippine Business for Education; PBEd, 2023) in which Filipino student's critical thinking skills have deteriorated. In reality, head campers may consider the prepared questions as easy but in the students' state, it is really difficult to handle.

"Sa ilang discussion mo kuan man sila (participate) ari na bitaw ka mangutana anang mga questions nga nanay how, nana bitaw explanation, naa na bitaw kinahanglan nga yes or no and why inig abot na sa why hala maungot jud tanan dina maningog sila gyud tanan…(T1)" (T1 mentioned that during discussions students participate, however, when she asked further questions like with how and with the explanation they wandered and remained quiet.)

"…dili kay sila makalahutay og tubag bitaw sir labi kung naay why pero imu lang gyud sila e encourage labi na kanang naa manjuy uban maulaw mo kuan kay English biya so ako ra sila giingnan nga pwede ra bisaya…(T5)" (T5 observed that students cannot answer "why" questions. Therefore, you need to encourage them to speak, especially if others are hesitant in the English language. So, she told her students to use Cebuano Visayan.)

Moreover, head campers find it challenging to ignite the students' participation because they cannot elaborate on their answers. In this concern, immediate authorities may take comprehensive actions on how to address the existing gap.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Head campers have both experienced triumphs and challenges during the preparation and implementation of the summer camp. The findings implied that despite the department and participants' efforts to make the program successful, there were still untoward instances beyond the program's expectations. Therefore,

mentoring sessions and feed-backing activities throughout the implementation must be strengthened and closely monitored by higher authorities so they can provide immediate and practical assistance for the head campers.

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