

Exploring The Experiences Of Elementary Teachers In Dealing With Bullied Students

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Abstract— This phenomenological study explored elementary teachers' experiences dealing with bullied students, which the researchers conducted in selected schools in Tagum City. The study used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with ten teachers as participants, selected through purposive sampling. The thematic analysis identified three major themes in teachers' experiences: understanding the background and environment of students, managing the emotional and psychological impact on teachers, and strategies for handling persistent bullying cases. Teachers highlighted ways of supporting bullied students, such as setting up rules against bullying, addressing and preventing bullying, attending to students' needs, and ensuring student monitoring. Finally, their insights from this study emphasized the importance of dealing with bullied students. They showed three major themes: bullying should be approached holistically, interventions should be systematic, and bullying can be addressed through value-based interventions. These findings provide valuable contributions to improving educational practices and policies to address bullying in elementary schools effectively.

Index Terms— Elementary Education, Bullying, Bullied Students, Teacher Experiences, Phenomenology, Philippines.

I. INTRODUCTION

Elementary teachers on the front lines played a role in addressing, supporting, and dealing with bullied students and aimed to reduce bullying at school (Luca et al., 2019). Teachers should know what bullying is, know the negative consequences for the victim, be confident in handling bullying scenarios, and know the appropriate strategies to use in such situations (Van et al., 2021). Furthermore, teachers must also be aware of the bullying process in the group. Students may be involved in a bullying situation not only as victims or bullies but also as helpers of the bully, reinforcers of the bully, defenders of the victim, or outsiders (Yun, 2020). Bullying is a pervasive and distressing issue in school. People commonly define it as repetitive and intentionally negative behavior directed at a victim who finds it difficult to defend himself or herself. Bullying has different forms, including physical, emotional, and cyberbullying. Bullying can cause severe consequences like physical and emotional trauma, decreased self-esteem, isolation, academic or professional underachievement, and even long-term mental health problems (Goodwin et al., 2019). Teachers who lack

confidence and abilities are less likely to intervene in cases of bullying. As a result, victimized students may be less likely to speak out about bullying. Furthermore, some teachers employ ineffective tactics, such as telling victims to avoid the bully or encouraging them to deal with the bullying independently (Troop-Gordon et al., 2019).

Furthermore, a study conducted in Malaysia shows that 63.2% out of 207 students were involved in bullying problems throughout the year, with verbal bullying at the highest, 55.1% (Md Isa et al., 2021). Moreover, the cyber bullying rate in India is 85%, UK (29%), US (26%), Malaysi (62.30%), Australia (79%), these data were so alarming (Mahawan & Arboiz, 2022). A recent study conducted in Bandung City, Indonesia, found that 52.5% of students experienced physical bullying, 60.6% faced verbal bullying, and 49.6% encountered psychological bullying at least once in the past month (Borualogo et al., 2020).

A research study conducted in Quezon City shows a total of 166 students aged between 10 and 12 years old have a prevalence of 15.66% of being bullied (Garcia et al., 2019). This result indicates that bullying occurs in schools, and thus, exploring the experiences of elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students is essential to addressing the problem. In addition, an article about the prevalence of bullying in elementary schools in Davao City is a

significant concern. The Davao City Council has enacted an anti-bullying policy (Davao's version of Republic Act 10627, also known as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013) to free public and private spaces, online platforms, workplaces, and educational institutions from bullying. The act created a City Anti-Bullying Council, which was in charge of developing regulations and the required education, preventive, counseling, and intervention strategies (Doss et al., 2023).

This study aimed to explore elementary teachers' experiences in handling or approaching children who faced bullying. Research suggests a need for more research on addressing bullying in schools. Especially in knowing the best strategies and approaches to prevent bullying in the school environment (Roca-Campos et al., 2021). Bullying is a subcategory of interpersonal violence characterized by power imbalance, repeated aggressive behaviors, and intentionality. It leads to social exclusion, verbal insults, emotional harm, and physical harm to victims (Ringrose et al., 2020). In order to prevent these circumstances, exploring elementary teachers' experiences is needed. Lastly, the findings will inform educational practices, shape policies, and strengthen support systems to foster a safer and more conducive learning environment in elementary schools.

In exploring elementary teachers' experiences dealing with bullied students, this study used the Social Ecological Model Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the leading theory, which offers a new perspective within developmental psychology and provides a framework for understanding the multifaceted influences of environment, surroundings, and societal structure, providing that the child's environment and aspects within the person affect the child's development.

II. METHODS

A. Research Participants

Ten (10) elementary teachers were interviewed from three different elementary schools in Tagum City. Five (5) participants each for IDI and FGD, guided by the following inclusion criteria: (a) elementary school teachers must be willing to participate voluntarily and provide informed consent for their involvement in the study, (b) with at least 5 years of teaching experience, (c) who personally experience dealing with bullied students, (d) teachers who serve as advisers, and (e) public school teachers.

B. Materials/Instrument

The researchers crafted and validated interview guide to understand the participants' experiences and gather reliable information guided by three major research questions: (1) What are the experiences of elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students as advisers?; (2) How do elementary teachers support bullied students?; and (3) What are the insights of the elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students?

C. Design and Procedure

The researchers used a qualitative investigation method particularly the phenomenological approach to explore elementary teachers' experiences with bullied students. The approach's primary purpose is to arrive at a description of the nature of the specific phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data findings. The researchers administered the interview and grouped, categorized, and translated the participants' responses, relevant statements, and core ideas into English for data analysis suggested by Collaizi (1978). Core ideas were thoroughly understood and examined to generate emerging concepts that supplemented the discussion. With the data collected, the researchers concluded and formulated recommendations based on the study's findings.

III. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The following were the essential themes come out from the experiences of teachers in dealing with bullied students as advisers: 1.) Student context assessment, 2.) Emotional toll, and 3.) managing consistent bullying. Meanwhile, 1.) Proactive role formation, 2.) Responding to students Needs, 3.) Promoting collaborative Intervention, and 4.) Continuous student monitoring come out as ways elementary teachers as adviser support bullied students. Furthermore, three major themes emerged from the insights of elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students as advisers: 1.) Holistic and compassionate bullying approach, value based- bullying prevention, and systematic prevention strategies.

DISCUSSIONS

The theme Student context assessment emerged as a significant experiences of teachers in addressing bullying among students. Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding the student's home environment to determine the

root causes of their behavior. For instance, IDI-1 noted that students might carry behaviors from their home into the classroom, where a supportive home environment often results in better behavior at school. IDI-4 also pointed out that students with poor hygiene and physical appearance are more likely to be targeted by bullies. This study supports the study of Vadivel et al. (2023), who states that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to engage in bullying due to factors such as poverty and social status insecurity. Relatively, students who experience domestic violence or familial conflicts are more likely to exhibit aggressive behaviors or become targets of bullying. Teachers must recognize these signs and understand their origins to provide appropriate interventions (Sprague & Walker, 2021).

Moreover, the theme Emotional toll emerged in dealing with bullied students as a significant challenge for teachers. IDI-4 noted that teachers must present themselves as solid and supportive of uplifting students' self-confidence, advising them to ignore bullies, and fostering a comfortable learning environment. This role involves carrying the emotional burdens of their students, leading to feelings of frustration and helplessness, especially when interventions are ineffective. FGD-3 reported that advising these students is emotionally draining because you often see the immediate impact on their self-esteem and mental health. The frustration of not always being able to prevent or stop the bullying can be challenging to handle. Furthermore, teachers often experience emotional stress and burnout when dealing with bullying due to the intense emotional involvement and the challenge of handling such complex issues (Kollerová et al., 2023). One cannot overstate the importance of a supportive school culture. According to Chan et al. (2021), teachers feel more empowered to address bullying effectively when school administrators prioritize teacher well-being and create a supportive network for educators. This supportive culture helps mitigate the feelings of isolation and helplessness that can arise when dealing with emotionally charged situations.

The last theme emerged in the experiences of teachers in dealing with bullied students as adviser is managing persistent bullying. Teachers must address the problem systematically, beginning with proper documentation and anecdotal records to track the behavior of the students involved. When bullying persists, involving the parents becomes essential. For example, IDI-1 revealed that they would call the parents' attention and present the documented evidence that something negative happened here in the classroom because of his behavior. A study by Tibbitts et al. (2021) states that school counselors can provide targeted interventions, such as conflict resolution training, social skills development, and individual counseling. Their expertise is crucial in addressing the underlying issues that contribute to bullying behavior. These strategies align with practices in bullying intervention, which emphasize the importance of documentation, parental involvement, and a multi-faceted approach to address complex bullying issues (Zar, 2019).

Proactive role formation emerged as teachers' way of addressing the challenges they have encountered in dealing with bullied students. This includes setting up rules against bullying as a crucial aspect of creating a safe and supportive classroom environment. For instance, IDI-1 emphasized the importance of establishing clear rules and regulations in her classroom to prevent bullying. She asserted that fighting is forbidden and has instilled a policy that bullying is terrible, ensuring students know the consequences of their actions. This approach helps students understand the severity of bullying and its repercussions. Furthermore, IDI-4 shared her strategy of proper seating arrangements to minimize interactions between bullies and their potential victims. She places students who are known to bully near the front row so she can monitor them closely and prevent any bullying incidents. This proactive measure helps create a physically and emotionally safe space for all students. In addition to structural rules, the emotional well-being of students is also a priority. FGD-5 emphasized the importance of storytelling and emotion check-ins to help students express their feelings and experiences related to bullying. This approach allows her to identify issues early and provide the necessary support. This finding supports the conclusion of Gaffney et al. (2021), which states that the primary goal of establishing anti-bullying rules is to create a safe and inclusive space where students can thrive. Teachers are educators, socializing forces, and classroom supervisors (De Luca et al., 2019). Among other conflict-resolution strategies, this initiative includes anti-bullying, anti-harassment, and violence prevention initiatives (Rawlings & Stoddard, 2019).

Next theme emerged as ways of elementary teachers support bullied students is responding to students needs. IDI-2 emphasized the importance of holding private conferences with students to address issues discreetly. FGD-1 added that providing a safe space for students to share their concerns is essential to address their needs effectively. Sharing these strategies and collaborating with other teachers can further enhance the support provided to students. These findings support Syukkur and Fauzan's (2021) conclusion that working toward a self-improvement target, like increasing patience, aids in developing competencies such as goal setting, dedication, and resilience. Bullying prevention includes six school programs, policies, and regulations that are implemented to identify, mitigate, and

address bullying issues in schools (Jain et al., 2018). When teachers use resource sharing, it shows they are open to trying new approaches to support their students' learning and teaching (Pepin, 2018).

Another theme emerged as ways of teachers in dealing bullied students is promoting collaborative intervention. The IDI-3 report revealed that she organizes mingling and workshops for students and staff to foster understanding and cooperation. This proactive approach helps create a supportive environment where bullying is less likely. A similar idea was also shared by IDI-4 and FGD-3, who emphasized the importance of conducting orientation awareness sessions and counseling with all stakeholders, including students, parents, and school staff, to raise awareness about the impacts of bullying and how to address it. In addition, IDI-1 shared that collaborative activities with peers, guidance counselors, and principals are crucial in addressing and preventing bullying. She believes these activities help build a strong student support network, making identifying and assisting at-risk people easier. This study is congruent with Sprague & Walker (2021), where collaborative efforts and open communication are vital to creating a safe and supportive school environment. Furthermore, when communities are vigilant and responsive, they send a clear message that bullying is unacceptable and will not stand. This cultural shift deters potential bullies and empowers bystanders to take action and support victims. Over time, these efforts contribute to developing a more empathetic and respectful society where individuals feel safe and valued (Paull et al., 2020).

The theme continuous student monitoring were the last to emerge as ways of teachers in dealing with bullied students. For example, FGD-2 highlighted the role of involving parents in the process by calling their attention to their child's behavior and showing them evidence of the cases. This transparency and collaboration with parents help address the issue comprehensively, as parents can support the school's efforts at home. IDI-3 shared her strategy of conducting home visitations to better understand the student's environment and engage with the family directly. As she shared, "This personal approach helps build a stronger connection between the school and the home, ensuring that students receive consistent support from both fronts." This study supports the study of Hannon et al. (2019) that teachers address bullying issues by documenting cases properly and maintaining anecdotal records.

The theme holistic and compassionate bullying approach is one of the insights of elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students. The theme is crucial for us to examine as we work to establish a thorough and effective response to student bullying. IDI-1 demonstrated that dealing with bullying requires creativity and a unique approach because some of the methods used were unproductive; therefore, you must be productive in thinking about how to handle the issue of bullying in the classroom. Moreover, IDI-4 stated that classroom management should be continuous, requiring constant monitoring and adjustment, improving routines to support students' learning and behavior, and incorporating good manners and proper conduct into a lesson to develop their characters, resulting in a harmonious environment. The result of the study agrees with the conclusion of Saldiraner and Gizir (2021) that bullying is complex and multifaceted, as well as the importance of a complete, collaborative strategy involving several stakeholders to prevent and respond to it in schools successfully. Additionally, ensuring a safe school environment through proactive intervention and escalating severe cases to the guidance office further enhances the school's support system. The study emphasizes the significance of a complete and collaborative approach to bullying prevention in primary schools, with all stakeholders working together to promote a safe and inclusive environment for kids (Baller et al., 2019). The study demonstrates that combating bullying necessitates a complex strategy that considers emotional, social, and environmental aspects consistent with a holistic approach to education and behavior management (Pusvitasari & Zarkasyi, 2024).

Another insights of teachers in dealing with bullied students is the systematic intervention and strategies. The theme of interventions is very significant for bullied victims, as it helps prevent such instances from occurring not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators. IDI-2 and IDI-3 stated that they can learn peacefully by fostering good camaraderie and creating a safe school environment for the victims. Furthermore, FGD-3 mentioned that they also include parents in the interventions; they make sure that the parents are well aware of the unseen behaviors of their children inside the school. Teachers conduct a PTA meeting to inform the parents of the student's performance, and they also show the report card to reveal evidence that the child committed a sign of bullying. FGD-4 also stated that they have a general assembly before the opening of classes, so they disseminate that to the parents so they are aware of the program of the school. This study aligns with the conclusion of Larrañaga et al. (2018) that the significance of parents being aware of bullying affecting their children is that this understanding influences how they respond and attempt to handle the matter.

Lastly, value-based bullying prevention is one of the insights of elementary teachers in dealing with bullied students. IDI-4 conveyed that we must incorporate subjects like character education or Christian living and also emphasizes that bullying should not be practiced, observed, or seen inside the classroom. Paying attention to bullied students and helping them feel valued. Guiding the students in the right direction is essential. IDI-2 asserts that one must be

encouraging, always use positive words, be empathetic, be a good listener, and let them express their thoughts and feelings because a teacher's role is crucial to the child's identity formation. In addition, creating a sound and supportive atmosphere in the classroom is significant for the students. The result of the study aligns with the conclusion of Hamdani (2024), which states that incorporating appreciation and empathy ideals into anti-bullying programs and education. These principles assist students in forming solid relationships, resolving issues, and promoting a culture of respect and inclusion. When students seek aid from teachers after being bullied, the teacher's response can significantly impact the result (Danielson et al., 2019). Given the growing awareness of bullying as a public health issue and the evidence of its negative impacts, there have been significant efforts at the practice, program, and policy levels to address bullying behavior (. The values-centered approach to bullying intervention proposes that establishing essential values such as respect, inclusivity, and compassion can help reduce bullying behaviors (Brown et al., 2021).

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATION

Researchers identified several factors influencing teachers' experiences in dealing with bullied students. They shared their challenges and strategies, often finding common ground with other educators. The study underscores the importance of professional development for teachers, specifically in promoting an open and safe environment, enabling them to handle bullying better and support their students effectively. Despite the challenges, embracing new techniques and approaches is essential for today's generation. This transformation is necessary to meet the needs of bullied students and enhance the overall learning experience (Sainz & Martín-Moya, 2023).

Moreover, creating an engaging and supportive learning environment for students is essential in educational settings. Captivating and relevant interventions enhance student interest and participation, making learning more enjoyable and effective. Addressing bullying in schools requires a comprehensive approach that includes understanding the complexities of students' experiences and employing suitable strategies to mitigate negative behaviors. As the findings indicate, teachers play a crucial role in recognizing and addressing bullying, which fosters a safer and more inclusive school environment (Francis et al., 2022).

This study suggests that if today's students differ from previous generations, teachers must adapt to these changes by integrating new techniques and approaches into their teaching practices in addressing bullying cases. Adapting to meet the needs of the younger generation is vital. Teachers can enhance student engagement and academic achievement by adopting innovative methods (Sutter et al., 2023). Furthermore, teachers should demonstrate commitment and dedication to preventing bullying, as they are instrumental in shaping the perspective of future generations to face challenges with resilience and understanding in maintaining a conducive environment. Educational institutions must address these common issues to achieve significant success in education. This study will also benefit future research on educational practices, bullying interventions, and related topics (Gaffney et al., 2021).

The researcher gained valuable insights and realizations from the study's findings. First, the critical role of interventions in improving student engagement and outcomes was acknowledged. Second, the practical difficulties and necessary factors for successfully implementing interventions were highlighted, such as choosing appropriate strategies and considering contextual factors. The emphasis is on the need for teacher education and professional development programs to effectively address bullying. Lastly, the potential of targeted interventions as tools for addressing bullying, energizing the classroom, and supporting effective teaching methods was recognized.

IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

After thoroughly reviewing and analyzing the study's findings, we present the following implications for educational practice:

Firstly, elementary teachers are encouraged to attend training and seminars on effective ways of dealing with bullying in their teaching strategies. By participating in these professional development opportunities, teachers can enhance their skills and gain valuable insights into maximizing the potential of various classroom interventions, promoting a safe and engaging learning environment. Additionally, teachers need access to resources such as counseling services, training materials, and support networks to handle bullying incidents efficiently. Collaborating and sharing resources with colleagues can also simplify finding effective strategies and interventions.

Secondly, pre-service teachers are encouraged to recognize the relevance of various interventions in teaching elementary pupils and incorporate these methods, as experienced teachers already do. By familiarizing themselves with different strategies, integrating them effectively, reflecting on their appropriateness, and embracing adaptability, pre-service teachers can enhance their teaching abilities and effectively address bullying in future classrooms

Thirdly, schools should have adequate support systems for faster and more effective responses to bullying incidents. By prioritizing robust support infrastructures within schools, educational institutions can empower teachers to fully leverage the potential of various interventions, creating safe and enriching learning environments for students.

Lastly, it implies that the Department of Education established a program or committee devoted to producing and disseminating effective bullying intervention strategies with contextualized and localized examples that are easily accessible for teachers to utilize in their teaching strategies. Although some existing programs and resources are available, only a few are relevant, helpful, and creative enough to be utilized in a classroom setting.

IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the data provided regarding elementary teachers' experiences dealing with bullied students, a study investigating teachers' experiences might have practical implications for teachers.

First, future researchers are encouraged to study areas with more diverse participants at selected schools in Tagum City, Davao del Norte. To capture a wider diversity of opinions and experiences, this may include broadening the study to include instructors from various schools in the area or across the country.

Second, the effectiveness of various bullying intervention strategies should be researched compared to traditional methods used by elementary school teachers. Compare teachers' experiences, perceptions, and outcomes using different approaches to handling bullying.

Third, study how elementary school pupils perceive various bullying intervention strategies. Investigate how students feel about these approaches compared to traditional methods regarding efficacy, engagement, and well-being.

Lastly, future research should specifically explore the impact on dealing bullied students to enhance understanding of the research.

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