



Embracing Challenges and Transforming Practices: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Master Teachers in English on the Implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) in the Philippines

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Abstract

The persistent issue of poor academic performance, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, led the Department of Education to implement the National Learning Camp (NLC) to enhance learning outcomes and support teachers. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of ten Junior High School master teachers in English regarding NLC implementation and how they addressed its demands and challenges. Using the transcendental approach and Colaizzi's Method of Phenomenological Inquiry, eight key themes were identified. Findings revealed that collaboration, differentiated instruction, and interactive teaching strategies were essential for addressing students' varying proficiency levels. Challenges such as low student engagement and attendance persisted, requiring motivational strategies. Teachers reported emotional and professional growth as they navigated increased workloads. To manage demands, they employed time management, instructional flexibility, and reflective practices. However, concerns about the short-term nature of the NLC underscored the need for sustained interventions to achieve lasting improvements. The study recommends institutionalizing collaboration through Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, improving workload management, enhancing instructional resources, and sustaining the NLC through continuous monitoring and evaluation. Further research should explore the long-term effects of the NLC and learners' experiences to strengthen its impact on English proficiency.

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1. Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful tools for driving social and economic progress, and governments worldwide continuously seek to improve learning outcomes to ensure equitable access to quality education. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the United Nations' (2015) ^[49] 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aim to tackle global inequalities, economic crises, conflict, and climate change. To "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," SDG 4: Quality Education was created and one of the indicators that supports the education sector. Sayed and Moriarty (2020) ^[45] affirmed that SDG 4 emphasizes the importance of education for diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and governments.

However, tensions over quality and learning persist since the SDGs' adoption in 2015. The concept of quality education gained prominence after UNESCO's 2013 'global learning crisis', highlighting the criticality of educational content and the fact that many students are not truly acquiring knowledge as observed by Acedo, Adams, and Popa (2012) in Sayed & Moriarty, (2020) ^[45]. Hence, educational institutions created and implemented programs that would augment to the academic performance of the

learners. In China, Lifang and Wentao (2020) ^[29] affirmed that learning camps have key characteristics that help the learners enhance their knowledge. Unfortunately, just like in other countries, Stafford (2023) ^[48] argued that in Australia, teacher shortages have led to the cancellation or scaling back of learning camps, underscoring the need for adequate staffing to maintain these educational programs.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced various educational reforms, particularly to enhance the performance of learners who struggle to meet basic competencies. One of the recent initiatives that is being implemented is the National Learning Camp (NLC), a program designed to provide intensive, focused support to students, especially in subjects where they exhibit low proficiency levels (Cacho & Santos, 2024) ^[7]. According to the released DepEd Order No. 14, s. 2023, the NLC aims to empower learners by reinforcing their understanding of fundamental concepts, thereby improving their academic performance and long-term educational outcomes. Moreover, Gagabe *et al.* (2024) ^[19]; Visca and Pelayo (2024) ^[51] explained that the NLC is a program designed to improve student learning and academic performance, particularly in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills. It complements regular school curricula and offers summer enrichment opportunities. Also, e-Camp activities enhance students' comprehension, abilities, creativity, problem-solving, potential, and motivation in English, according to Aini and Prihantoro's (2024) ^[1] research.

Furthermore, the NLC supports learning recovery, engages students, promotes innovative teaching practices, and enhances teacher capacity. It also aims to improve attendance, encourage collaborative approaches, and equip educators with diverse student needs, especially in underserved or rural areas. The camp also focuses on addressing learning loss, promoting comprehensive student growth, enhancing teacher competence, providing targeted support, and creating a supportive learning environment. It also fosters social-emotional skills, personal growth, and character development among students.

However, the NLC remains crucial because, as Quezada (2024) ^[40] pointed out, teachers encountered difficulties implementing the NLC, mostly because of limited access to technology and instructional resources. Likewise, the abrupt implementation of the NLC led to teachers feeling ill-prepared, causing stress and difficulty in meeting program demands. Additionally, a decline in student enrollment and attendance further complicated the teaching process. Also, the study of Cacho and Santos (2024) ^[7] revealed that the volunteer Science teachers encountered challenges such as limited budget, lack of support, diverse participant backgrounds, and insufficient administrative support. With that, it is essential to investigate how the Master Teachers manage these problems, being the frontliners and mentors of the teachers. According to Dingal (2023) ^[14], master teachers who possess highly skilled mentoring practices have a moderately substantial impact on students' academic achievement and greatly improve the instructional practices of their teachers.

While the NLC represents a promising response to educational disparities, little is known about how this program is experienced by master teachers, who are at the frontline of its implementation. They possess extensive experience and are instrumental in adapting and delivering curriculum-based interventions to meet the diverse needs of

their students. Still, the practical realities, emotional labor, and pedagogical adaptations they employ remain underexplored. This gap in the literature is significant because the success of the NLC largely depends on teachers' ability to engage students effectively and on their insights into what works and what doesn't within the classroom. A phenomenological approach allows for a deeper exploration of these educators' personal experiences, perceptions, and meanings attached to their involvement in the NLC, thus illuminating the human aspects of educational reform often overlooked in policy-oriented discussions.

To further and specifically examine the implementation of the NLC on addressing the problems of the learners in their competencies in English, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of the ten (10) master teachers in English within selected large and/or very large schools from the five (5) City Schools Division Offices (San Pedro City, Biñan City, Sta. Rosa City, Cabuyao City, and Calamba City) in the Laguna Cluster of Region IV-A. Adopting a phenomenological research design, this inquiry focused on capturing the nuanced insights, challenges, and adaptive strategies that these educators employ in the NLC's implementation, especially in teaching English to the learners who participated in the program, since the recent studies explored the perspective of Science teachers and volunteer teachers in general. Through in-depth interviews, this research revealed how the master teachers perceive their roles within the program, the barriers they encounter, and the emotional and professional impacts of their work. This study does not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the NLC's implementation but also offers a platform for teachers' voices, particularly in teaching English to the learners, thereby providing valuable implications for improving program delivery, policy adjustments, and support systems for teachers. Lastly, this research aimed to shed light on the experiential dimension of educational reforms, offering recommendations that resonate with the real-world experiences of educators in similar contexts. This would hopefully achieve the goal of the researcher to enhance the learners competencies, particularly those who have low English language proficiency.

2. Methods

This study utilized the qualitative research method to investigate the lived experiences of the Junior High School master teachers in English during the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC). This non-experimental study described the present condition from collected data, using phenomenological research to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The description entails "what" and "how" the participants experienced the existing phenomenon (Creswell, 2007 in Romero *et al.*, 2023; Van Maanen, 1990, p.177) ^[10, 41, 41]. This approach allows for deep insights into the master teachers' experiences and provides rich, descriptive data that reflects the complexities of human experiences. The flexibility in data collection methods, such as interviews or focus groups, is crucial in exploring the nuances of the master teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Specifically, the researcher used transcendental phenomenology, also known as psychological phenomenology, which focuses on describing participants' experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations (Cortezano, *et al.* 2024 in Moustakas, 1994) ^[35]. Moreover,

Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method was used to interpret and reveal the existing phenomenon among Junior High School master teachers' experiences on the implementation of the NLC. Praveena and Sasikumar (2021)^[39] applied Colaizzi's data analysis technique to extract, organize, and analyze research data, and it was revealed in their study that it is effective in identifying significant statements from transcribed verbatim and formulating meanings, based on actual data. Hence, in this study, this approach helped the researcher find out truths about the subject through descriptions of collected data and determining their connections. Furthermore, bracketing, horizontalization, thematic analysis, and identifying key themes helped draw meaningful insights and conclusions about their lived experiences on the implementation of the NLC and its associated challenges, particularly in teaching English.

This study used purposive sampling, which means that the researcher intentionally chose and pre-determine the participants based on a set of inclusion criteria. Similar to the study of Quezada (2024)^[40], this study selected ten (10) participants as the main sources of data to attain the objectives. According to Creswell (2017), the researcher may interview five (5) to (25) individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon to collect enough data to understand and describe rich details of the essence of the experience.

Primarily, the participants were master teachers in English. Secondly, they have taught English and engaged themselves in the implementation of National Learning Camp 2023 and 2024. Thirdly, they have the permanent position as Master Teachers in Junior High School for at least two (2) years. Finally, they came from the large school size (i.e., with 751-1250 student population) and/or very large school size (i.e., with 1,251 and above student population) based on the DM No. 344 s. 2020. The researcher selected the participants from the five (5) City Schools Division Offices in the Laguna Cluster in Region IV-A; they were divided equally, hence two participants per City Schools Division were chosen.

Moreover, since this study covered the five different SDOs, Snowball sampling was also utilized to easily complete the target participants of the study. It is an established and effective technique for recruiting study participants who are not readily accessible or known to the researcher (Leighton, *et al.*, 2021 in Marcus *et al.*, 2017; Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017; Reagan *et al.*, 2019)^[27].

Thus, the researcher asked for referral of others to successfully find the qualified participants in this study. Considering the locale of the study, the researcher found it best to implement snowball sampling to easily establish communication with the participants.

A researcher-created interview guide questions with ten (10) open-ended questions was used in this study to obtain information about the insightful experiences of the English master teachers from the five (5) Schools Divisions in the Laguna Cluster. The "what" of the study regarding MTs' actual experiences with the NLC's implementation was addressed by five questions. Then, five more questions answer the "how" section, which described how they dealt with the demands and difficulties of implementing the NLC, especially when it came to teaching English to the campers in NLC 2023 and 2024. Furthermore, at least three experts assessed the structured interview guide questions beforehand to guarantee that the study's goals were met. Following validation, the participant was able to access and respond to

the structured interview guide questions by communicating with them via Facebook messenger. This way, the master teachers only responded when they have time, which did not cause disruption with their classes. They also communicated from time to time to entertain queries or clarifications on the questions.

Since this study used snowball sampling, the researcher communicated to the participants via social media and referral of others. After that, the researcher messaged the participants, verified if they were qualified to the criteria, and informed them of the study's goals and encourage them to become participants. To indicate their approval, the participants signed the "Informed Consent form." Following the master teachers' consent to participate in the study, the researcher sent the interview guide questions through Facebook Messenger with the letter to the participants. Next, the researcher examined the data after each participant has finished responding to the interview guide questions. As this study adhered to Colaizzi's method of phenomenological inquiry, the researcher communicated with the participants once more to confirm the verbatim narratives they provided as a last step after identifying the themes. The study's core findings were credible and reliable since participants were free to correct and further clarify the responses they provided. The researcher employed Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method to elucidate the essence or fundamental structure of the phenomenon being studied among the participants. Figure 3 demonstrates that Morrow, Rodriguez, and King (2015)^[34], as cited in Romero *et al.* (2023)^[41], stated that the researcher initially familiarize themselves with the data by reviewing the participants' responses. The subsequent phase involved determining the statements directly pertinent to the phenomenon being examined. This process involved horizontalization, wherein the researcher emphasized noteworthy statements, including sentences, phrases, or quotations.

Afterwards, meanings pertinent to the phenomenon were derived by bracketing. This stage assisted the researcher in deriving meanings from the emphasized significant statements. Adjacent to the bracketing, the researcher formulated substantial meaning clusters into themes utilized to compose a textual account of the participants' experiences. Theme clustering assisted the researcher in formulating descriptions of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007)^[10]. A comprehensive and inclusive account of the phenomena were composed, incorporating all the ideas generated in the preceding step.

Subsequently, the researcher distilled the exhaustive description which were presented by providing the textual and structural descriptions, elucidating the "essence" of the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013)^[35, 11]. Upon articulating the central "essence" of the phenomenon under investigation and establishing the fundamental structure, the researcher presented the findings to the participants to ascertain if their experiences have been accurately represented. Finally, the modification were executed following the validation of the research participants.

3. Results and Discussions

The following are the eight (8) themes emerged based on the fifty-nine (59) formulated meanings from the two hundred eighty-two (282) significant statements:

1. As to the lived experiences of junior high school master teachers in English regarding the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC)

Theme 1. Collaboration as a key driver for effective implementation

Collaboration among teachers played a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC). The program required teachers to work closely together, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and professional support. Through coaching sessions, lesson planning discussions, and strategy-sharing, teachers were able to refine their instructional approaches, ensuring that lessons were more engaging, structured, and responsive to students' needs.

Additionally, collaboration extended beyond peer-to-peer interactions among master teachers; it also involved partnerships with teachers from different grade levels and subject areas. This cross-level collaboration introduced new perspectives and innovative teaching methods that might not have been previously explored in traditional classroom settings.

In the study of Yap (2024) ^[52], it was revealed that collaborative leadership is one of the common management styles of master teachers where they emphasize teamwork, shared decision-making, and open communication across all levels of an organization. Moreover, they found value in mentoring one another, strengthening their instructional strategies, and addressing challenges through collective problem-solving. This theme was justified and supported from the participants' significant statements:

"Teachers worked together through brainstorming sessions, lesson planning, and sharing strategies to ensure effective NLC execution." (P5, P7, P8)

"Collaboration between elementary and high school teachers was a new but valuable experience." (P7)

"Regular collaboration provided opportunities to refine teaching methods and enhance the overall learning experience for both students and teachers." (P2, P4, P5, P8)

As affirmed as well by Visca and Pelayo (2024) ^[51], through collaboration, teachers not only enhanced the quality of instruction but also cultivated a sense of professional growth and community, ultimately leading to a more effective and well-implemented learning camp. Thus, as Quezada (2024) ^[40] also found out, the NLC fosters a collaborative and dynamic teaching environment, enhancing the engagement of both teachers and learners.

Theme 2. Differentiated and student-centered instruction enhances learning

One of the most critical aspects of the NLC's effectiveness was the implementation of differentiated instruction and student-centered learning approaches. Given that students had varying levels of proficiency in English, teachers needed to adjust their methods to meet diverse learning needs. Differentiated instruction allowed struggling learners to receive targeted support, while more advanced students were given challenging tasks to further develop their skills.

To enhance engagement, teachers designed interactive and experiential learning activities that catered to different learning styles. Strategies such as gamification, storytelling,

project-based learning, and role-playing made learning more dynamic and relatable. Additionally, integrating real-world applications helped students see the relevance of English in everyday situations, making learning more meaningful. These explanations were evident based from the participants' significant statements below:

"Teachers had to adapt the curriculum and use differentiated instruction to address varying proficiency levels." (P4, P5)

"Student-centered and interactive approaches, including group discussions, gamification, and storytelling, made learning more engaging." (P1, P3, P4, P9)

"Teachers incorporated project-based learning, storytelling, and role-playing to develop students' communication skills." (P4, P9, P10)

By customizing instructional strategies, teachers ensured inclusivity, allowing every student to participate actively regardless of their skill level. This approach contributed to higher engagement, better comprehension, and a more enriching learning experience for both students and teachers. Moreover, some of the engaging instructional strategies revealed in this study were similar how Lifang and Wentao (2020) ^[29] identifies youth camp education in China: fun, situational, interactivity, growth, generative, autonomy, openness, and experience. Furthermore, this theme was evident in the study of Aini and Prihantoro (2024) ^[1] which they argued that e-Camp activities enhance students' comprehension, abilities, creativity, problem-solving skills, potential, and motivation in English proficiency.

Theme 3. Student engagement and attendance remain a challenge

Despite the benefits of the National Learning Camp (NLC), one of the most persistent challenges encountered by teachers was maintaining student engagement and ensuring consistent attendance. Visca and Pelayo (2024) ^[51], Quezada (2024) ^[40], Cacho and Santos (2024) ^[7] also highlighted these challenges in their studies. Since participation in the program was voluntary, some students lacked commitment, leading to fluctuating attendance and difficulty in sustaining learning momentum. Also, the teachers observed that low engagement levels were particularly evident among struggling learners, as they tended to feel discouraged when faced with academic difficulties. Additionally, mixed proficiency levels in classrooms made it challenging to equally address the needs of all students, requiring teachers to implement extra motivational strategies.

To counteract disengagement, teachers employed various techniques, including gamification, peer tutoring, and rewards-based incentives. These strategies helped sustain students' interest and encouraged participation. However, even with these efforts, some students remained inconsistent in their attendance, affecting the continuity of their learning progress. To justify and support this theme, below are some of the significant statements of the participants:

"Since NLC was voluntary, some students were not fully committed, making motivation a challenge." (P6)

"Some students struggled with attendance, affecting the continuity of learning." (P6, P8)

"Teachers used strategies such as gamification, peer tutoring, and personalized support to keep students

engaged." (P1, P2, P8)

The challenge of student engagement and attendance highlighted the need for more structured incentives and follow-up mechanisms to ensure that students remain motivated and consistently participate in the program.

Theme 4. Emotional and professional growth among teachers

The National Learning Camp (NLC) was not only an opportunity for students to enhance their English proficiency but also a significant learning experience for teachers. While the program demanded extra time and effort, many teachers found fulfillment in witnessing their students' progress, reinforcing their passion for teaching. The experience required teachers to balance their personal responsibilities with their professional commitments, making it both physically and emotionally demanding.

Moreover, the teachers had to develop resilience, patience, and adaptability as they navigated the challenges of implementing the program with limited resources and varying student needs. Despite the challenges, teachers gained a sense of accomplishment as they saw their students gain confidence and improve their skills. The experience also reinforced the importance of lifelong learning and professional growth, as teachers continually adapted their methods to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Based on the significant statements of the participants below, this theme was justified and supported.

"Teachers found the experience challenging but fulfilling, balancing personal time and dedication to students." (P5)
"The additional workload of preparing instructional materials and conducting multiple lessons in a short period led to fatigue, requiring better planning and collaboration." (P3, P4)
"Witnessing student progress and confidence-building gave teachers a sense of accomplishment." (P3, P5, P9, P10)

This theme underscores that, beyond academic outcomes, the NLC was a transformative experience for teachers, fostering emotional resilience, professional development, and a deeper commitment to education. As asserted as well by Gagabe *et al.* (2024) ^[19], the NLC promotes innovative teaching practices, and enhance teachers capacity. Similarly, as confirmed by Visca and Pelayo (2024) ^[51], this study revealed that master teachers had personal and behavioral advantages, signifying a quest for professional development and recognition.

These four themes provide a holistic representation of what is the lived experiences of Junior High School Master Teachers in English regarding the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) in its first and second implementation. They highlight both the successes and challenges encountered throughout the process, emphasizing collaboration, differentiated instruction, student engagement, and teacher growth as central aspects of the program's impact.

2. As to how do the participants address the demands and challenges associated with the implementation of the National Learning Camp, particularly in teaching English to NLC campers

Theme 5. Effective time management and prioritization for sustainable implementation

Master teachers addressed the demands of the National Learning Camp (NLC) by employing structured time management strategies that allowed them to balance their NLC responsibilities with regular teaching duties. The ability to allocate dedicated time for lesson planning, instructional delivery, and assessment ensured that both their regular and NLC-related obligations were met without compromising the quality of education. By setting clear priorities and adhering to well-organized schedules, they maximized productivity and minimized the risk of burnout.

Beyond personal time management, teachers also engaged in collaborative planning to distribute tasks effectively, preventing work overload. They identified key areas that required immediate attention while ensuring that necessary adjustments were made in response to student needs. Moreover, teachers emphasized the importance of taking short breaks and maintaining a sense of balance to sustain their energy and effectiveness throughout the program. Hence, similar to findings of Quezada (2024) ^[40] the effective time management and prioritization exhibited by the teachers stemmed from collaborative planning, innovative engagement strategies, resourcefulness, and adaptability to challenges, which collectively contributed to their ability to implement the NLC sustainably. Below are some of the significant statements from the participants to justify and support the fifth theme:

"Proper time management, including setting aside dedicated time for planning and execution, allowed teachers to fulfill both NLC and regular teaching responsibilities without compromising quality." (P1, P4, P5, P9, P10)
"Some teachers ensured they took short breaks to avoid burnout while maintaining a strong focus on completing necessary tasks effectively and efficiently." (P5)
"Balancing NLC with regular duties required careful planning to avoid being overwhelmed." (P6)

By employing structured schedules and prioritization strategies, master teachers successfully managed the dual demands of NLC and regular teaching responsibilities, ensuring that both students and educators benefited from a well-organized and sustainable learning experience. Fortunately, the master teachers in this study did not encounter one of the challenges of learning camps in Australia which teacher shortages. As Stafford (2023) revealed, the problem in staffing caused the educational program to be cancelled.

Theme 6. Adjustment and flexibility in teaching strategies

Master teachers demonstrated adaptability by modifying their instructional approaches based on student needs, real-time classroom dynamics, and assessment results. Instead of

rigidly following pre-designed lesson plans, they made adjustments to better suit the varying proficiency levels of NLC campers. This approach allowed for a more personalized learning experience, ensuring that struggling students received additional support while advanced learners were provided with enrichment activities.

Reflection played a key role in this adaptive process. Teachers continuously evaluated their teaching methods through self-assessment and discussions with colleagues during Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. By sharing best practices and identifying strategies that worked well, they refined their approaches to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. To justify and support this theme, here are some of the significant statements from the participants:

"Some master teachers adjusted their teaching methods by modifying lessons to better fit student needs rather than strictly adhering to pre-made lesson plans." (P8)

"Instruction was adjusted in real-time based on formative assessments and student responses." (P4, P5)

"Reflection on teaching strategies and sharing best practices through LAC sessions helped teachers continuously improve their approaches." (P3)

Quezada (2024) ^[40] confirmed the challenges faced by teachers during the implementation of the NLC, including inadequate access to technology, learning materials, and tools, and lack of preparation due to sudden implementation. In this study, the participants affirmed that through continuous adjustment and flexibility, teachers ensured that the NLC remained responsive to students' learning progress, making lessons more effective and fostering greater engagement. As asserted by De Guzman (2022) ^[12], master teachers must augment their professional teaching competencies by engaging students, cultivating an effective learning environment, comprehending subject matter, devising successful teaching strategies, evaluating student learning, and participating in continuous professional development.

Theme 7. Dedication, passion, and experience in overcoming challenges

The successful implementation of the NLC was largely driven by the dedication, passion, and experience of master teachers. Their commitment to student learning propelled them to go beyond standard instructional practices, ensuring that each lesson was meaningful and impactful. Despite facing challenges such as resource limitations, workload management, and student engagement issues, their perseverance and intrinsic motivation allowed them to overcome these obstacles.

Experienced teachers, in particular, leveraged their years of service and training to navigate the complexities of the program. They drew from their expertise in differentiated instruction, classroom management, and instructional design to tailor their approaches to the needs of NLC campers. Their passion for teaching served as a source of inspiration, motivating them to continuously seek better ways to support their students. This theme was justified and supported from the participants' significant statements below:

"Experienced teachers found it easier to adapt to NLC demands due to their years of service and training." (P3, P5)

"Passion and commitment drove teachers to persevere despite challenges, making the teaching process more fulfilling." (P5)

"The experience made teachers more reflective about their teaching practices and adaptable to new methods." (P10, P9)

With their unwavering commitment and professional expertise, master teachers turned challenges into opportunities for growth, ensuring that NLC campers received the best possible learning experience. These experiences could augment the character traits that Espinosa, (2024) ^[18] highlighted which are responsibility, integrity, and resilience, and some other characteristics that need for further development like empathy, compassion, and respect for diversity.

Theme 8. Addressing the limitations of short-term interventions for long-term impact

While the NLC provided valuable learning opportunities for students, master teachers recognized the limitations of short-term interventions in addressing long-standing English proficiency gaps. They expressed concerns that while the program introduced effective strategies and reinforced interactive learning, its temporary nature made it difficult to sustain long-term improvements. Without continuous support beyond the camp, students risked losing the progress they had made during the program.

To address this issue, teachers advocated for sustained efforts, including follow-up programs, integration of NLC strategies into the regular curriculum, and continued professional development opportunities. They emphasized the importance of reinforcing the skills acquired during the camp through year-round instructional support, ensuring that students benefited from lasting improvements in their English proficiency. Moreover, as confirmed as well in the study of Quezada (2024) ^[40], the teachers' experiences illustrate a proactive approach to addressing the limitations of short-term interventions through learner-centered practices, engaging activities, collaboration with stakeholders, and a focus on skills that promote long-term learning. While the NLC served as a remedial program, the strategies employed by the teachers aimed to create sustainable impacts that extend beyond the intervention period. To justify and support this theme, below are some of the significant statements from the participants:

"Some teachers realized the limitations of short-term programs like the NLC in addressing long-term English proficiency gaps." (P6)

"The need for sustained efforts and continuous support beyond the NLC was emphasized." (P6)

"It reinforced the importance of continuous professional development to enhance teaching effectiveness." (P9, P10)

By acknowledging the constraints of short-term interventions and advocating for ongoing support, master teachers underscored the need for a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to improving English language proficiency among learners. Further observations, monitoring, and research would help to examine and substantiate the efficacy of this educational program, enhancing the expanding corpus of knowledge regarding its

effects (Association for Camp Leadership, 2023) [5].

Textural Description

The implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) provided Junior High School Master Teachers in English with a multifaceted experience that encompassed both instructional innovations and professional challenges. A key aspect of their journey was the emphasis on collaboration, which played a crucial role in ensuring the program's success. Teachers actively engaged in coaching sessions, brainstorming discussions, and resource-sharing, allowing them to refine their instructional strategies and approach challenges collectively. Working closely with colleagues fostered a sense of professional camaraderie, strengthening their ability to develop innovative lesson plans and implement effective teaching methods. The collaboration extended beyond teacher interactions, as they also partnered with school administrators and stakeholders, ensuring the seamless execution of the program. This collective effort empowered educators, making them feel more motivated and invested in the success of their students.

Another defining experience was the necessity of differentiated and student-centered instruction in response to students' diverse learning needs. Teachers recognized that their learners had varying levels of English proficiency, which required them to adapt their lesson plans, instructional methods, and classroom activities accordingly. They found that integrating interactive and experiential learning strategies, such as gamification, storytelling, role-playing, and real-world applications, significantly enhanced student engagement. These approaches not only made learning more enjoyable and meaningful but also allowed students to develop a deeper connection to the language. Despite these successes, the teachers also faced challenges in ensuring balanced attention to all students, particularly when managing large groups with mixed proficiency levels. Nevertheless, their experiences reinforced the importance of tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs, as this method proved to be the most effective in promoting active learning and engagement.

A recurring challenge throughout the NLC was the struggle to maintain student engagement and attendance. Since participation in the program was voluntary, many students demonstrated inconsistent commitment, making it difficult for teachers to sustain motivation and learning continuity. Teachers experimented with various strategies to encourage attendance, including the use of incentives, gamified learning activities, and peer tutoring, which yielded varying degrees of success. Some students responded positively to rewards-based motivation, while others remained disengaged despite teachers' best efforts. The lack of a structured reinforcement mechanism beyond the NLC further complicated this issue, as teachers believed that long-term support and follow-up programs were necessary to maintain students' enthusiasm and commitment to improving their English proficiency.

Beyond instructional concerns, teachers also experienced emotional and professional growth as they navigated the demands of the program. Balancing teaching responsibilities with personal commitments was a major challenge, especially given the additional workload of lesson preparation, material creation, and individualized student support. Many teachers found the experience to be both physically and emotionally demanding, requiring resilience, adaptability, and patience. Despite these difficulties, they

expressed a deep sense of fulfillment and accomplishment upon witnessing their students' progress. Observing learners gain confidence in using English, improve their communication skills, and actively participate in lessons reaffirmed their passion for teaching and reinforced their commitment to student-centered education. The experience also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence, as teachers learned to approach their students with empathy, understanding, and encouragement, recognizing that academic growth is deeply intertwined with emotional and psychological well-being.

The implementation of the NLC was a transformative journey for teachers, characterized by both triumphs and obstacles. Their experiences underscored the critical role of collaboration, differentiated instruction, sustained student engagement, and personal growth in achieving meaningful educational outcomes. While the program presented significant challenges, it also provided teachers with valuable insights and professional development opportunities, ultimately strengthening their commitment to fostering an inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environment for all students.

Structural Description

The implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) required master teachers to navigate the complexities of balancing instructional responsibilities, adapting to student needs, and ensuring the sustainability of learning outcomes. Their experiences were shaped by the structural and systemic factors within the educational environment, influencing how they addressed the challenges of the program while maximizing its potential impact. Master teachers employed effective time management and prioritization to handle the additional workload brought by the NLC. Given the concurrent responsibilities of regular teaching and mentoring, they structured their schedules meticulously to ensure that both NLC and regular class obligations were met. The structured yet flexible approach to time management allowed them to maintain instructional quality while avoiding burnout. Their ability to allocate dedicated time for planning, execution, and self-care underscored the necessity of balancing professional responsibilities with personal well-being.

Adaptability became a defining characteristic of how teachers engaged with the program. Through adjustment and flexibility in teaching strategies, they moved away from rigid lesson plans and instead tailored their instruction based on student responses and formative assessments. This dynamic approach required constant self-evaluation, as well as collaborative reflection with colleagues in Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, to refine instructional methods and address learning gaps in real time. The structural support provided by professional learning communities allowed teachers to experiment with and integrate various instructional modifications, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of their teaching practices.

Beyond logistical and pedagogical adjustments, dedication, passion, and experience played a crucial role in overcoming the challenges of the NLC. Despite resource constraints and the pressures of meeting diverse learner needs, master teachers remained deeply committed to student success. Their years of teaching experience enabled them to navigate the complexities of differentiated instruction, student engagement, and curriculum adjustments. Their passion for

teaching was a driving force that sustained their motivation, allowing them to find fulfillment in their roles despite the inherent difficulties of the program.

However, the structure of the NLC itself presented a fundamental challenge—its short-term nature limited long-term impact, prompting teachers to critically assess the sustainability of the program. While the initiative introduced innovative strategies and reinforced student-centered learning approaches, its temporary framework raised concerns about its effectiveness in addressing deep-seated English proficiency gaps. Teachers recognized that without ongoing reinforcement, students might struggle to retain and apply the skills gained during the camp. This structural limitation highlighted the need for continuous professional development, curriculum integration of NLC strategies, and long-term interventions to ensure lasting improvements in language proficiency.

Taken together, the structural description reveals that master teachers operated within a framework that required them to juggle multiple demands, modify instructional approaches, and compensate for systemic constraints through dedication and collaboration. Their ability to adapt, innovate, and persist within these structural realities defined their overall experience with the NLC, shaping how they addressed its demands and challenges in teaching English to campers.

Essence

The lived experiences of Junior High School Master Teachers in English during the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) were marked by a dynamic interplay of professional collaboration, instructional adaptation, student engagement, and personal commitment. At its core, their journey reflected a profound dedication to fostering student learning amidst systemic and pedagogical challenges. The NLC served as both a platform for innovation and a test of resilience, requiring teachers to navigate the complexities of time constraints, varied student proficiency levels, and the program's structural limitations.

Collaboration emerged as a vital force in ensuring the effectiveness of the camp. Teachers actively engaged in peer coaching, resource-sharing, and cross-disciplinary discussions, reinforcing a collective sense of responsibility toward improving student outcomes. This shared commitment created an environment where innovative teaching strategies flourished, allowing teachers to refine their instructional methods through mutual support and professional discourse. The experience underscored the significance of teamwork in overcoming challenges, demonstrating that sustained collaboration strengthens not only instructional delivery but also teacher morale and motivation.

Adaptability became a defining characteristic of the master teachers' engagement with the NLC. Faced with students of diverse linguistic competencies, they shifted from rigid lesson structures to more fluid and responsive teaching approaches. Through differentiated instruction, interactive learning techniques, and real-world applications, they sought to create a meaningful and engaging learning experience. Their flexibility in modifying strategies based on student needs underscored the importance of responsiveness in education, highlighting that effective teaching is an evolving process shaped by continuous reflection and adjustment.

Despite their best efforts, maintaining student engagement and attendance posed a persistent challenge. The voluntary

nature of the program meant that teachers had to employ creative strategies to sustain students' interest and participation. While some methods, such as gamification and peer tutoring, yielded positive results, the lack of a long-term reinforcement mechanism limited the continuity of learning gains. Teachers recognized that motivation alone was insufficient without systemic structures to support and sustain student progress beyond the duration of the camp.

Amid these challenges, the master teachers found a deeper sense of fulfillment and professional growth. Their experiences in the NLC reaffirmed their passion for teaching and their commitment to student-centered learning. However, the short-term nature of the program raised concerns about its lasting impact, leading them to advocate for more sustainable interventions that extend beyond the camp's duration. The experience highlighted the necessity of institutional support, continuous professional development, and curriculum integration to address English language proficiency gaps effectively.

From these results, the essence of their lived experience in the NLC reflects a dual reality: a profound dedication to student learning intertwined with the constraints of systemic limitations. The program became a space for both transformation and struggle, revealing the resilience, creativity, and unwavering commitment of master teachers in shaping meaningful educational experiences despite the inherent challenges of the initiative. Indeed, it was evident that embracing challenges and transforming practices became the central theme of their experience, as they continuously adapted to the demands of the program while striving to enhance student learning.

Verification

In this study, member checking was the technique used to validate the analysis of data. The researcher returned and presented the findings of this study to the participants. Their views on the results of the study were obtained by sending the findings to the participants through Facebook messenger, where they had communication with the researcher during the gathering of data.

All the participants were satisfied with the results and agreed that the results and conclusions accurately reflect their understandings, emotions, and experiences toward the implementation of the National Learning Camp, particularly in teaching English to the Junior High School learners. Some of them even showed appreciation for being part of the study and were grateful to express their experiences.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn regarding the lived experiences of the selected ten Junior High School Master Teachers in English on the implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC):

1. The National Learning Camp (NLC) provided Junior High School Master Teachers in English with both opportunities and challenges. Collaboration was essential for effective implementation, fostering teamwork among teachers and administrators. Differentiated and student-centered instruction enhanced learning by addressing diverse proficiency levels through interactive strategies. However, student engagement and attendance remained a challenge, as voluntary participation led to inconsistent commitment. Despite the demands, the NLC contributed to teachers'

emotional and professional growth, strengthening their resilience and adaptability. To maximize impact, future implementations should enhance student motivation, extend program duration, and integrate NLC strategies into regular curricula.

2. The implementation of the National Learning Camp (NLC) highlighted both the strengths and challenges faced by Junior High School Master Teachers in English. Collaboration, adaptability, and effective time management emerged as key factors in successfully delivering student-centered instruction despite workload demands. Teachers' dedication and passion enabled them to overcome challenges, yet student engagement and attendance remained persistent concerns. Furthermore, while the NLC introduced effective teaching strategies, its short-term nature limited long-term language proficiency improvements. To sustain progress, teachers emphasized the need for continuous support, curriculum integration, and professional development. Therefore, the NLC was a transformative experience that reinforced the value of innovative teaching, shared responsibility, and lifelong learning in improving English education.

5. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made:

1. National Learning Camp Volunteer Teachers (Master Teachers and Teachers), student engagement and motivation should be enhanced by implementing structured student motivation programs such as recognition systems, progress-tracking tools, and gamified learning techniques to sustain student interest in English learning.
2. Parents and guardians should actively support the NLC by attending orientations, raising awareness, and encouraging their children to participate and attend regularly. Your involvement is key to its success.
3. Schools principals should strengthen the teacher support and professional development by providing continuous training and capacity-building programs for teachers on differentiated instruction, adaptive teaching methodologies, and innovative strategies for engaging students with diverse proficiency levels by organizing regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and mentoring programs to encourage knowledge-sharing and collaboration among educators. Moreover, they may develop a structured feedback system where teachers can share best practices, challenges, and suggestions for improving the implementation of the NLC.
4. Schools Division Personnel, especially Education Program Supervisors should increase support for the NLC implementation, by allocating funds to ensure resource availability like learning materials to ensure that schools receive adequate instructional resources, including textbooks, worksheets, and digital tools.
5. The Local Government Units (LGUs) should support the schools, particularly the volunteer teachers by funding training workshops and seminars to equip them with effective strategies, provide partnerships among government agencies, and private sectors to secure additional funding for technology and learning materials.
6. Policy makers of educational programs should consider improving program implementation and sustainability

through the conduct of regular monitoring and evaluation of the NLC to assess its effectiveness and make necessary improvements based on student performance data and teacher feedback.

7. The Department of Education (DepEd) should advocate for the institutionalization of the NLC as a long-term intervention rather than a temporary measure, ensuring ongoing support for students struggling with English proficiency. Additionally, a structured follow-up program, such as supplementary English workshops, tutorials, or reinforcement activities within the regular curriculum, should be implemented to sustain learning gains.
8. The researcher should advocate for the dissemination of the study's findings to educational stakeholders to raise awareness of the experiences of the master teachers. Furthermore, the researcher should collaborate with educators, policymakers, and local government units to develop evidence-based interventions that address the challenges of the master teachers and volunteer teachers as well.
9. Future researchers may evaluate the long-term effects of the National Language Center (NLC) on learners' English proficiency, explore the experiences and learning challenges of the learners, and assess the effectiveness of various instructional strategies to identify the most effective methods for language skill improvement.

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