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## **Lived Experiences of Multi-Grade Teachers with the Dumagat Learners During the New Normal**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.4.723.49704>

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to determine the prevailing situations or conditions on teaching the Dumagat learners experienced by five (5) teacher-participants. They shared their experiences teaching the Dumagat learners in remote schools in City Schools Division of Antipolo- District II-F specifically, Paglitaw Elementary School and Apia Integrated School. It was found out that the three major themes emerged relative to the participants' responses listed as physical and emotional discomfort, community adaptation and self-motivated attitudes. Majority of the participants teaching in urban remote schools have negative impact towards their environment. Through the face-to-face interview, the participants revealed things on how to cope up with the situation: building relationship, willingness, and growth. It was also revealed that the teacher-respondents had to make adjustments with work-adjustment, self-gratification, and sense of commitment. This study suggested that the teachers teaching the Dumagat learners must undergo training and workshops where they should be assigned. Through these trainings and workshop culture shock among the teachers would be minimized if not totally eradicated. It was concluded that teaching in remote schools gave a lot of experiences to the teachers of Dumagat learners. The participants in the study experienced physical and emotional discomfort, community adaptation and self-motivated attitudes. They were challenged to work out of their comfort zone and to deal with the indigenous students in the mountain schools that gave a positive impact on them. Longitudinal studies were strongly recommended for understanding not just the experiences of teachers in teaching Dumagat learners but the long-term effects of working condition. It was also recommended that future researchers study the teachers who are teaching other indigenous group of learners.

**Keywords:** Indigenous People, Mountain School, Curriculum, Education, Pandemic, New Normal

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### **1. Introduction**

“We sense that ‘normal’ isn’t coming back, that we are born into a new normal: a new kind of society, a new relationship to the earth, a new experience of being human.” (Charles Eisenstein, June 2019).

It is indeed true that all are now facing a new normal, a reality we have to embrace amidst pandemic which has been affecting us for almost three years now. Everyone is trying very hard to lead a normal life despite some difficulties. Our time now is different because we still have to follow some protocols which everyone says, makes a day-to-day life so hard to live. Pandemic has come unprecedented not only in this country but also for the whole world. Everything has changed, and everyone must bear with the new rules and protocols implemented for health reasons and for everyone’s own safety. The new normal has a big impact in the education sector due to this pandemic. How would learners learn in the new normal? What will be the modes of learning scheme while following the new normal protocols? How could learners be engaged in the different activities that must be done to develop their abilities, knowledge, and skills in a certain subject? These are just few of the questions and issues which the education sector must address.

At first, the Department of Education (DepEd) standardized the education curriculum for all in the Philippines. This curriculum promotes better products of education even with the Indigenous People (IP). Simply, education is for all, no discrimination in whatever ethnic group a Filipino belongs. This education must need versatile teachers to handle the cases of teaching Indigenous People, in such a way that their culture wouldn’t be affected. The IP learners must still keep their beliefs, religion and culture while learning the knowledge, skills and attitudes which they will carry throughout their lives. With the standardized curriculum, teachers must adapt the teaching strategies in order to respond to the new situation.

It is every Filipino’s right to be educated and to gain equitable opportunity in the society. This is an unalienable right that is being experienced by most people in the whole world. In the Philippine context, during the Duterte administration, support was allotted to uplift the quality of education of the Filipinos by instilling enormous changes in this sector. One great leap of the government was the implementation of the K-12 curriculum that aimed to make students be at par with its neighboring countries. Drastic changes were implemented in the hope of making the graduates far better from those products of the old curriculum. The authorities of the Philippine educational system made possible the construction of new buildings, acquisition of new books and enforcement of training for old and new teachers. Indeed, education has come to a different form and figure. Change has been felt and seen in

many aspects in the educational system. On top of that, education has made it possible to offer free education for all State Universities and accredited Local Universities and Colleges. It is therefore safe to say that the people in the Philippines are experiencing a new wave of hope for progress as manifested in the changes of the educational system. But these good things and positive changes seem to be far from being experienced by the Dumagats; one of the marginalized communities in the Philippines. Many studies and research were conducted to be updated of their ways of life so the government can extend a help to them. But until this day, the IPs still have difficulty surviving life. Though they are just few hours from the mainstream or lowlands, the promise of progress and comfort are far from being realized. Loud but inaudible cries come out from these marginalized and unrepresented highlanders, but their sobs of help just resounded on the high mountains of Sierra Madre.

It is no wonder then that for many indigenous parents, sending their children to school has become a priority. They do not want their children to experience as they have, been cheated by lowlanders just because they do not know how to read, count, or write. On the other hand, with education comes new needs, wants and outlooks; e.g., certain "selfish" desires are being kindled in the children. To address this dilemma and to give due recognition to the worldviews of the indigenous peoples, integrating local knowledge to ensure quality education for their learners can never be overemphasized. (People's Education in the Philippines).

Modular teaching is one of the most widespread and recognized teaching learning techniques in many countries including other Western countries and Asian region. Modular approach is used almost in all subjects like Natural Science, specifically in Biology, Medical Education, Social Sciences as well as in Computer Education. (Manlove and David, 1985). It is considering the individual differences among the learners which necessitate the planning for adoption of the most appropriate teaching techniques to help the individual grow and develop at her/his own pace (Kandarp Sejpa, 2013).

Bolida (2015) once mentioned in her write up in *Inquirer*, one of the top daily newspapers in the country, that education is the best key to solve ignorance. Education can make wonders and it is the best escape from poverty. This statement was supported by the establishment of the two-room elementary school for the Dumagats in Norzagaray. The building was just established three years ago and was being managed by Department of Education. The Dumagat children get their education from this facility, and they start building their dreams. They learn basic arithmetic, reading and writing. There are two teachers who normally stay in school for the entire week with a make-shift dwelling. Learning is multi-level, a teacher teaches two grade level, which can be hard for both the teacher and the students due to the lack of attention. The students learn basic Arithmetic, Reading and Writing and once they finish their basic education, they have to go to a nearby school, an hour walk on foot, to pursue Junior and High School Education. The hardship that the young Dumagats face to earn knowledge is being intensified by the ridicule they get from their classmates due to their appearance. Children with strong will are only the ones who survive. There are some who are lucky to go through college. But they are not excused to the hardships their younger siblings experience. They too have to suffer the same fate; long walk to school, empty stomachs in class, no fare or allowance, discrimination and so many more. Most of the students who go to universities stop before they get the degree. These Dumagats thrive hard to survive their daily lives. It is just hard to realize that people wish for them to get a better place in the community but little help to no action has been done. According to the 1987 Philippine Constitution; The state shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. This promise however has not been realized. Education has not been equitable and accessible for the Dumagat tribes.

Teachers promote best education for the learners and even for out of school youth. Teachers also provide materials for their students if they can. In a normal scheme, teachers manage all the situations inside the classroom, within the school environment and even in the community by observing the manners and attitudes, skills, and abilities of their students. Indigenous People (IP) students may be very different from the people who are living in urban areas in the way they act, they behave, and they communicate. They should be guided by the teachers for the IP to be totally educated well, to be transformed into good individuals and to become intellectual beings. The challenge that faces teachers in today's pandemic situation is to handle learners through a distance mode and still get good performance from them.

One group of Indigenous People is the Dumagat Tribe which is now spreading nationwide in the Philippines and specifically expanding their families in a remote area of Antipolo City specifically in Barangay Calawis.

Apia Intergrated School and Paglitaw Elementary School are both part of mountain schools located in Barangay Calawis, Antipolo City. These public schools are accepting different students with different culture and behavior. The schools' modality in delivering education to students is Modular Distance Learning (MDL).

On this note, this research would like to bridge the gap between the experiences of teachers in teaching the Dumagat learners in a regular way of teaching and a new normal situation. Thus, this research shall provide a background for the teachers to understand about the Indigenous Peoples' actions, behaviors, and intellects. It shall try to describe how teachers interact with their IP students as they learn in a way that it would not affect their culture and beliefs.

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## 2. Background of the Study

The unquestionable relevance of education is the eradication of poverty and promotion of economic growth. Education places education at the center of individual pursuits for social mobility. In consideration of the belief that education promotes, societal and economic development of an individual, educators and policymakers should collaborate in the efforts of bringing education to the people, including the indigenous communities. Indigenous communities preserve their traditional education sans innovation, sans technology; thus, limiting their opportunities. In tribal education, knowledge is gained from first-hand experience and then transmitted or explored through ritual, ceremony, art, and appropriate technology. Tribal education, in this context, becomes education for "life's sake" (Cajete, 2006). Education is the key towards social mobility in a highly stratified socio-economic society. One of the State Policies contained in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Section 17 states that "The State shall give priority to education, science and

technology, arts, culture, and sports to foster patriotism and nationalism, accelerate social progress, and promote total human liberation and development.” Aside from this, education is considered a human right which allows improvement of one’s standard of living. The right to Education is internationally and globally recognized to bring about changes in the world and among individuals (Mandela, n.d.; United Nations, 2017). It is a right not only of those who can afford to pay for a good education but by anyone regardless of the language or religion, whatever the color of skin and circumstances of birth or social origin, notwithstanding opinions, political inclinations, and economic condition. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in December 1960 sponsored the Convention Against Discrimination in Education purposely to eliminate and prevent discrimination in Education. The Philippines is composed of various ethnic groups including the Dumagat tribe. They mostly live along the Pacific coast of the province of Aurora. According to Guia (2012), the Dumagat people residing in Luzon are of the Agta Negrito group; one of the identified and recognized tribes in the Philippines. In the past, the Dumagats lived in coastal areas, particularly in the Aurora and Quezon provinces. They were rulers of their own land. But urbanization set in and Filipino homesteaders pushed the Aetas into the mountains, dispersing them into smaller groups, in the process. Today they are classified as semi-nomadic as they seldom stay in one place. Some of their tribe often look for better habitation. Only in recent years did they learn to settle in one area. The term Dumagat may have been derived from the word “Gubat” (forest) and “Hubad” (naked). But the more logical origin of the term would be “Taga-dagat” which means “living near the sea” or “sea gypsies.” According to Gabriel (2017), tourism may be one of the major reasons why the Dumagats were forced to leave the seashores and retreat into the mountains and near riverbanks, away from regular community establishments such as schools—to live in peace. Hence, today, the Dumagats are one of the many IPs/ICCs seemingly deprived of their right to Education. IPs are significant groups of people in communities. When properly “recognized” and given positive attention through holistic Education, they could be useful toward national development. There is a lack of a definitive, universal description of “indigenous” but Cobo (1983) mentioned that IPs are those having their historical continuity developed within their own territories. When referring to Education, the term Indigenous generally pertains to the first or original inhabitants of a later colonized group by a group of powerful people who imposed their own culture and language on the original inhabitants (Reyhner & Singh, 2015). This historical definition of “indigenous” prompted institutions to implement policies that will protect the rights of IPs and ensure that their culture and traditions are preserved. The integrity of this protection, however, at times, remains to be questionable as they are constantly challenged by adapting to mainstream culture. The rights of the IPs/ICCs to Education were made prominent in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. Various constitutional provisions grant the IPs the rights to Education along these lines: (a) to establish and control their education (b) to receive protection of the State without discrimination; and (c) a mandate for the state to take measure to ensure children of indigenous peoples to have access to Education using their own language and culture. (The 1987 Philippine Constitution) The Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) have been proven to contribute to the sustainability and productivity of many ecosystems, examples of which include the rice terraces and imuyung (private woodlot of the Ifugao, the traditional biodiverse swidden of the Hanunuo, the fish conservation practices of the Dumagat, and the traditional herbal medicines of many Filipino ethnic communities. (ILO) Undoubtedly, the indigenous people’s communities have made courageous efforts to protect their IKSPs, but with the rapid development around them and subsequent massive degradation of natural resources, those efforts are not enough. Their local initiatives need to be recognized, enhanced and supported by the government (ILO). In consideration of the belief that education promotes societal and economic development of an individual, finding ways to improve education is of paramount importance. Thus, educators and policymakers should collaborate in the efforts of bringing education to serve more people. Mei Kuin (2009) asserted that “schools with primarily indigenous and ethnic minorities in low socioeconomic areas have long been associated with low levels of achievement, particularly in literacy.”

Therefore, the geographical location prohibiting accessibility poses a challenge in educating the Dumagats. Moreover, by bringing education to the people, rather than people to education, they create the possibility for real personal, organizational and community learning on-the-ground in developing countries (Zuber-Skeritt & Teare, 2013). The aim of this research is to identify and determine the lived experiences of the teachers in teaching Dumagat learners in the new normal situation. This research will be done in district II-F, Division of Antipolo City, where most of the schools have teachers who are teaching Dumagat learners. The teachers were asked different questions on how they overcome the situations, how they compared the uphill and downhill students, how they managed their learners, and how they achieved the good results in educating the Dumagat learners using the new normal scheme. This study described the lived experiences of teachers in teaching Dumagat learners using the new normal scheme specifically in the district II-F of City Schools Division Office of Antipolo, where the demographic population of Dumagat learners is high. Due to the new scheme in educating learners, the researcher wanted to study the experiences of teachers teaching in the far-flung-areas with indigenous learners using their style in delivering different modalities.

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### 3. Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research methodology since the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Leedy (2000) described qualitative research as useful in answering questions about any phenomena that aim to describe and understand the phenomena from participant’s point of view. Phenomenological research design to “make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Creswell, 1998, 15). Qualitative research focuses on people, their experiences, and how the experiences answer the questions about a research topic (Creswell, 2013). Further, qualitative research focuses on naturalistic inquiry (Creswell, 2013). This means that real world situations are studied in a natural way. This type of research is emergent in nature, making it adaptable or flexible (Creswell, 2013). The research data were collected by means of structured interviews with five participants. The aim of using structured interviews was to allow participants to guide the direction of the research by using formulated questions to guide the research process. All participants were the teachers handling classes with Dumagat learners at the time that they were interviewed. The participants were teachers who have a permanent status at work. Discourse analysis was used to make sense of the constructions of the participants. Discourse analysis is an approach that explores the underlying meaning and motivation behind a text (Parker, 1992). A discourse is referred to as the conversations and the meanings behind the conversations as understood and articulated by a group of people (Parker, 1992). According

to Forrester, Ramsden, and Reason (1997) Foucault argued that a discourse consists of acceptable statements made by a certain type of community such as people who share similar thoughts and ideas. The constructions articulated in this research were analyzed using discourse analysis in order to understand the meanings behind these constructions.

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#### 4. Results and Discussion

There were four research questions addressed in this study. 1) What are the experiences and challenges encountered by the teachers in teaching the Dumagat learners in the new normal situation? 2) How do teachers cope up with the challenges encountered in teaching the Dumagat learners? 3) What are the implications of the teachers' experiences and challenges to teaching the Dumagat learners? 4) What teacher training programs can be proposed based on the results of the study? Five participants were purposively selected and were able to share their lived experiences in teaching Dumagat learners in a new normal scheme in urban remote schools and how they cope up with those experiences and challenges. Interviews for each participant were all done in less than an hour. The audio and video recordings of the interview were transcribed by the researcher and double checked for accuracy of statements. There was no software used in the translation. The participants who underwent study and interviews were the teachers of Dumagat learners in urban remote schools who shared their experiences on how difficult it was to be in the situation. They were challenged to work out of their comfort zone and to deal with the indigenous students in the mountain schools, but they have gone far in their journey to deal with those students in that environment. Their situation in the mountain schools was not easy at all. They had adjustments and gratification of oneself but still had positive experiences. They had encountered different experiences that made them become better persons and manifested the desire to stay and reach the poorest family in the remote areas. But with these challenges, the participants were able to cope up by the trusting relationship among their colleagues that developed their willingness and growth that made them decide to stay in their respective schools.

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#### 5. Conclusion

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The results suggested that teaching in remote schools gave a lot of experiences to the teachers of Dumagat learners. The participants in the study experienced physical and emotional discomfort, community adaptation and self-motivated attitudes. They were challenged to work out of their comfort zone and to deal with the indigenous students in the mountain schools that gave a positive impact distinctively described as work-adjustment, self-gratification, and sense of commitment.
2. Through this phenomenon, the participants were able to cope up by building relationship among their colleagues, the various factors as satisfiers and dissatisfiers were present in the environment in schools that impelled them to acquire the need and drive to be motivated. These developed their willingness and growth and made them decide to stay in their respective schools.
3. This study contributed to the larger existing body of literature on the experiences of teachers teaching in mountain schools, that even if they are working out of their comfort zone they still achieved the job satisfaction. In addition, it provided further support to the existing literature that suggests that "mind sets" are characterizing the commitment of employees to the organization and the motivation that drew them to focus on work performance to achieve job satisfaction. The participants who were involved in the study tended to be determined with growth in their job. They have self-motivated attitudes towards their decision to stay in their respective schools more years than expected.
4. This study suggested that the teachers teaching the Dumagat learners must undergo trainings and workshops where they should be assigned. Through these trainings and workshop culture shock among the teachers would be minimized if not totally eradicated. In order for them to be more prepared and motivated, different programs and supports must be issued to these brave teachers.

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#### 6. Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions drawn from the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Longitudinal studies are strongly recommended for understanding not just the experiences of teachers in teaching Dumagat learners but the long-term effects of working condition.
2. The study focuses only to the teachers of Dumagat learners teaching in remote area in district 2-F of Antipolo City. So, the researcher recommended the future researchers to study the teachers who are teaching other indigenous group of learners.
3. Since teachers are working in the mountain schools that are considered being out of their comfort zone, schools may conduct a seminar/training/orientation that help them understand the culture and working condition of their school and increasing an individual needs for achievement.
4. Educational institutions must provide adequate different techniques and approaches for the distance learning with enough resources especially during pandemic.
5. In addition, it is suggested that they need to explore the support system involving the parent-teacher relationship, NGO's, Barangay officials, and the community towards the development and enhancement of the teaching-learning process among the Dumagat learners.

### Acknowledgements

A year before pandemic is such a great experience in a classroom setup while studying his master's degree, indeed became a challenge which impacted the different sectors brought by the health crises and one of these is the education sector which didn't expect the big adjustment in delivering lessons and conducting research. But despite the circumstances while earning his master's degree, he continued without hesitation to pursue his goals. The journey of earning his master's degree has been one he would never forget; every lesson he learned has enlightened him, igniting a deeper passion to make a difference in the field of education. He is grateful for every step along the way. First, the researcher thanks **God** for his favor, wisdom, and strength. He knows that he cannot achieve with his abilities alone but must have help from heavenly father. His hand has been ever present with him from the beginning. The researcher's **family**, who are always there to guide him all the way. The never-ending prayers, love, and support physically, emotionally, and financially to him is very grateful which made him strong to face any challenges that may come along the way while achieving his goals. The researcher thanks his **colleagues at Apia Integrated School** who have traveled this road alongside him. Their support and encouragement nourished his soul and warmed his heart. In particular, he would like to thank **Victoria Evangelista, Regina Abordo, Luisa Sultan, Jessilyn Villanueva, Shengie Sembrano, and Jay-Ar Veric** for the great friendship and for the full team force support. The researcher would like also to extend his gratitude to the **Research Respondents**, for actively participation and for giving the heartedly and honestly answer to the interview during the conduction of research. He is inspired doing his research because of **Miguell Torrejos Tanfelix**. He would like to give thanks for the inspiration he showed to the researcher as an artist and real-life friend, which he pushed him to continue what he really loves to do and the passion that his heart really wants. He forever indebted to his advisors from FEU Roosevelt, **Dr. Barbie Wong-Fernandez, Dr. Rommel De Leon, Prof. Jason Carlos, Dr. Crissanta Buri, and Dr. Victor Tabuzo** for their untirely support in checking and giving advice to make this research possible. As well as their guidance and motivation to finish this qualitative research. **Professor Elizabeth Veridiano**, his adviser who pushed him to succeed and never expected less than his best. He is truly amazing and an intricate part of his growth through this process. He has given the best support he has ever received as a student.

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