

# Walking in the Tightrope: The Balancing Act Of Teachers as Curriculum Heads

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*Abstract* — The primary objective of this research was to explore the experiences of classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in performing their dual functions. To achieve this, a qualitative, phenomenological research approach was adopted, and data was gathered from 8 classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in the Cluster 13, Division of Davao City. Several themes emerged, shedding light on the lived experiences of classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in performing their dual functions. Noteworthy themes included time management and prioritization, collaboration with stakeholders, contextualizing the curriculum, and monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, the research delved into the coping mechanisms employed by the teachers to overcome challenges. Notable coping strategies encompassed setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks, seeking support and mentorship, time blocking and tasks chunking, and seeking professional development opportunities in curriculum. By conducting an in-depth analysis of these experiences and coping mechanisms, the study yielded valuable insights and fresh perspectives. The lessons learned from the teachers' experiences are of great significance. These lessons underscore the importance of strengthening collaborative skills, adapting to changing educational trends, and strengthening leadership skills. Such lessons are instrumental in shaping effective teacher training programs aimed at equipping educators with diverse strategies and techniques to foster a positive classroom climate.

*Keywords* — *Teachers' lived experiences, coping mechanisms, lesson learned, curriculum head, dual function, Davao City, Philippines.*

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## I. Introduction

In the field of education, teachers are often required to take on additional roles and responsibilities beyond their primary classroom instruction duties. One such role is that of a curriculum head, where teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of leading curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. Balancing the dual functions of being a teacher and a curriculum head is akin to walking on a tightrope, requiring skillful navigation and adept balancing of competing demands.

In the United States, classroom teachers who were assigned as curriculum leaders performed their dual roles by involving various strategies and practices. Collaborative planning is a common approach, where teachers engage in collaborative sessions with colleagues to align curriculum, share best practices, and ensure a cohesive instructional approach (Smith, 2022; Johnson et al., 2019). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate, analyze student data, and make informed decisions about curriculum

implementation (Davis & Thompson, 2020; Williams, 2018). Some schools offer instructional coaches who work closely with teachers to support curriculum development and provide feedback (Brown, 2021; Anderson, 2017). Effective time management is crucial as teachers allocate time between classroom instruction, curriculum planning, and administrative tasks related to their curriculum leadership role (Jackson, 2019; Martinez & Davis, 2020).

Furthermore, ongoing professional development helps teachers enhance their skills as curriculum leaders and stay updated on research-based practices (Robinson, 2018; Carter & Johnson, 2021). Data-informed decision making allows teachers to use student data to inform curriculum decisions and adjust instructional strategies (Lee et al., 2019; Wilson, 2020). Communication and collaboration with administrators, colleagues, and stakeholders are essential for navigating dual roles and ensuring alignment in curriculum implementation (Garcia, 2018; Thompson & Smith, 2021).

In Finland, teachers seamlessly perform their dual roles as both classroom teachers and curriculum heads, emphasizing their professionalism and autonomy in education. As classroom instructors, teachers are dedicated to delivering high-quality instruction, facilitating discussions, and assessing student progress. They employ student-centered approaches that promote active participation and independent thinking (Sahlberg, 2011). Additionally, teachers play a crucial role in curriculum development and design, tailoring the national curriculum to meet their students' needs and local contexts. This autonomy allows them to choose teaching materials, develop lesson plans, and effectively implement the curriculum (Simola, 2005).

It's important to note that Finnish teachers undergo comprehensive training and hold high qualifications. They typically possess a master's degree in education or a related field (Sahlberg, 2011). The teacher education programs emphasize pedagogical knowledge, subject expertise, and practical teaching experience. This rigorous training equips teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively fulfill their dual roles as classroom instructors and curriculum heads.

As classroom instructors, teachers in Austria deliver lessons, facilitate learning activities, and assess student progress. They create engaging learning environments, encourage active student participation, and provide guidance and support to individual students (Gruber, 2018). Teachers employ various teaching methods and strategies to cater to diverse learning needs and foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Brunner et al., 2019). They play a crucial role in imparting subject-specific knowledge and promoting holistic development among students.

Austrian classroom teachers also serve as curriculum heads, contributing to curriculum development and design. While there is a national curriculum framework in place, teachers have the autonomy to adapt and contextualize it to meet their students' needs and local circumstances (Brunner et al., 2019). They have the flexibility to select teaching materials, design instructional plans, and determine the sequence and pacing of content delivery. This allows teachers to cater to

the specific interests, abilities, and cultural backgrounds of their students, promoting a more meaningful and relevant learning experience.

In the Philippines, being classroom teachers they are responsible for delivering lessons, facilitating learning activities, and assessing student progress. They create engaging and interactive learning environments, employing various instructional strategies to cater to the diverse needs and learning styles of their students (Bautista et al., 2016). Filipino teachers often incorporate active learning methods, collaborative activities, and real-life applications to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills among their students (Aguinaldo, 2017). They also prioritize the development of values, character, and citizenship education, aiming to foster holistic growth among students (Bautista et al., 2016).

In addition to their roles as classroom teachers, Filipino teachers also contribute to curriculum development and implementation. The Department of Education (DepEd) provides a national curriculum framework that serves as a guide for teachers (DepEd, 2013). Teachers have the responsibility to interpret and adapt this framework to suit their students' needs, local context, and available resources (Bautista et al., 2016). They have the autonomy to select and design learning materials, plan instructional sequences, and adjust the curriculum content to ensure its relevance and effectiveness (DepEd, 2013).

In the local scenario, particularly Bustamante National High School of Cluster 13. Teachers who were assigned as curriculum heads encountered a variety of experiences in performing dual functions. Some are positive while some negatively affect their teaching performance. However, there is not many materials/studies wherein they can rely on in terms guidance on how to be an effective curriculum head as well as a teacher and solution to problems encountered in school that they need to address. It is in this context that this study is conceptualized to find out the experiences of teachers who were assigned as curriculum heads in other schools in cluster 13 as they perform their dual functions.

## II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to research, specifically a phenomenological research design. According to Creswell, (2012), phenomenology was an approach to qualitative research that focused on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the phenomenon. Typically, interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. Other forms of data such as documents, observations and art were also used. The data were read and reread and were culled for phrases and themes that were grouped into clusters of meanings. Through this process, the researcher was able to construct the universal meaning of the event, situation or experience and arrived at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

The participants of this study were Eight (8) classroom teachers from Cluster 13, Division of Davao City. The participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) must be in the service for at least 5 years; (2) secondary school teacher; and (3) assigned as curriculum head.

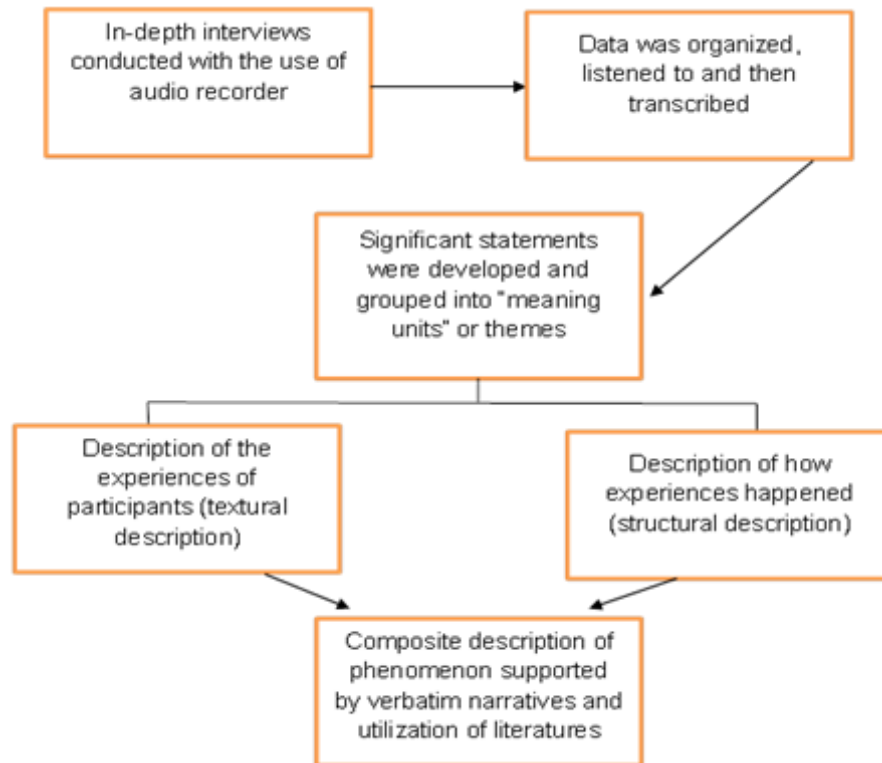
The researcher utilized the purposive sampling design since the participants were chosen based on the criteria or purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). It is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. The selection of the participants was purposefully done to ensure that the findings would be authentic (Marshall, 1996).

The researcher implements the qualitative method correctly. To do so, the researcher assesses himself and seeks help to the research adviser and other research professionals. These help him exhibit competence in explaining the study without biasing the participants, conducting interviews properly according to the design, making appropriate field observations, selecting appropriate artifacts, images, and journal portions, employing Environmental Triangulation and Thematic Content Analysis precisely.

The framework analysis of this research was flexible to allow the researcher to either collect all the data and then analyze it or do data analysis during the collection process. In the analysis stage the gathered data was sifted, charted, and sorted in accordance with key issues and themes. This involves a five-step process: (1) familiarization; (2) identifying a thematic framework; (3) indexing; (4) charting; and (5) mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994).

The researcher's drive in knowing the deeper meaning of the experiences of classroom teachers who were assigned as curriculum heads became the basis for doing qualitative research, a means of which Kalof and Dietz (2008), as cited from Gerodias, (2013) considered helpful in looking for "meanings and motivations that underlie cultural symbols, personal experiences and phenomena". By using phenomenology, this need was hoped to be addressed by bringing the experiences of school teachers who were assigned as curriculum heads in a manner that, as David (2005) wrote, the themes, symbols and meaning of the experiences presented. Phenomenological research was based on two premises. The first was that experience was a valid, rich, and rewarding source of knowledge. According to Becker (1992), as cited in Morrissey & Higgs, (2006), that experience was a source of knowledge and shapes one's behavior.

From the definition, human experience was viewed as a cornerstone of knowledge about human phenomena and not as an unreliable source. The second premise of phenomenological research lies in the view that the everyday world is a valuable and productive source of knowledge, and that we can learn much about ourselves and reap key insights into the nature of an event by analyzing how it occurs in our daily lives (Morrissey & Higgs, 2006).



**Figure 2. Analytical Framework of the Study**

### III. Results and Discussion

#### *Experiences of classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in performing their dual functions*

Teachers adeptly perform their dual functions by seamlessly integrating their roles as both classroom instructors and curriculum heads. As classroom instructors, teachers focus on providing high-quality instruction, creating an engaging learning environment, and assessing student progress. They employ various pedagogical strategies, such as differentiated instruction and active learning methods, to meet the diverse needs of their students and foster critical thinking skills (Hattie, 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2003). By utilizing effective instructional techniques and individualizing support, teachers ensure that students receive optimal learning experiences tailored to their abilities and learning styles (Marzano, 2007). or efficient utilization of time and resources.

In their capacity as curriculum heads, teachers assume responsibility for curriculum development and implementation. They work within the framework provided by educational authorities or institutions to adapt and customize the curriculum to suit the unique needs of their students and local contexts (Bautista et al., 2016). Teachers have the autonomy to select appropriate learning resources, design lesson plans, and determine the sequencing and pacing of

curriculum content. They draw upon their expertise and collaborate with colleagues to refine the curriculum, align it with instructional practices, and integrate feedback from ongoing assessment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). By combining their knowledge of effective teaching strategies with their curriculum leadership, teachers ensure the coherent implementation of the curriculum in a way that maximizes student learning outcomes.

*Coping mechanisms of classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads on the challenges in performing their dual functions*

Teachers cope with the challenges of performing their dual functions through various strategies and approaches. They employ effective time management techniques to prioritize tasks, set realistic goals, and allocate time for both classroom instruction and curriculum responsibilities (Mertler & Campbell, 2005). By managing their time efficiently, teachers can navigate the demands of their dual roles and ensure that both aspects of their work receive adequate attention.

Additionally, teachers rely on collaboration and support from colleagues and administrators to cope with the challenges. They engage in professional learning communities, seek mentorship, and establish networks with fellow educators to share ideas, resources, and strategies (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Collaborative problem-solving and the exchange of best practices not only provide support but also enhance teachers' ability to manage their dual responsibilities effectively. Furthermore, teachers engage in ongoing professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills in curriculum design, instructional strategies, and assessment practices (Reeves, 2010). Continuous learning enables them to stay updated with current research and innovative approaches, leading to improved performance in both their roles as classroom instructors and curriculum heads.

*Educational management insights gained from the experiences of classroom teachers in balancing their roles as curriculum heads*

Classroom teachers gain valuable insights through the experience of balancing their roles as curriculum heads. They develop a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in curriculum development, instructional leadership, and the interplay between curriculum design and classroom instruction (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). By juggling these dual roles, teachers gain firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities in aligning curriculum objectives with instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of their students (Ryder & Ribbins, 2018). They also develop a heightened awareness of the importance of effective time management, prioritization, and collaboration with colleagues to ensure a balanced approach to their responsibilities. Through this experience, teachers gain insights into their own strengths, areas for growth, and the importance of ongoing professional development to enhance their curriculum leadership skills (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These insights ultimately contribute to their professional growth and their ability to make informed decisions that positively impact student learning outcomes.



### *Analysis*

As curriculum heads, teachers gain insights into the value of collaborative structures such as professional learning communities (PLCs) (DuFour, 2004). They recognize that PLCs provide dedicated spaces for educators to come together, share best practices, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. By facilitating PLC meetings and guiding discussions, teachers strengthen their collaborative skills and contribute to a supportive environment that promotes continuous improvement (DuFour, 2004). They learn to leverage the diverse perspectives and experiences of their colleagues to enrich curriculum design and decision-making processes. Through active participation in PLCs, teachers enhance their ability to collaborate effectively and create a culture of ongoing professional development and learning.

By balancing their roles as classroom teachers and curriculum heads, teachers gain valuable insights into the benefits of collaborative skills. They recognize that collaboration is essential for building effective partnerships, facilitating professional learning communities, and leveraging diverse perspectives (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; DuFour, 2004). Through their experiences, teachers strengthen their ability to work collaboratively, engage in meaningful discussions, and make informed decisions that benefit their students and improve curriculum outcomes.

Classroom teachers who also serve as curriculum heads gain valuable insights into the importance of adapting to changing educational trends (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013; Kumar & Chua, 2018). As they navigate the dual responsibilities of instructional delivery and curriculum design, teachers develop an understanding of the dynamic nature of education and the need to stay current with evolving trends. They learn to recognize the impact of societal shifts, technological advancements, and research-based practices on teaching and learning. By engaging in ongoing professional development and actively seeking out resources and information, teachers in these roles can adapt their instructional strategies and curriculum to align with the changing educational landscape.

Through their experiences, teachers gain insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by changing educational trends. They recognize the need for flexibility and openness to new approaches, as well as the importance of critically evaluating the effectiveness of emerging trends in the context of their students' needs and the overall educational goals. This adaptability allows them to effectively incorporate innovative pedagogical practices, technology integration, and current research findings into their teaching and curriculum design. By embracing change and continuously adapting to new educational trends, teachers enhance their ability to provide relevant and engaging learning experiences for their students.

### *Discussion*

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and classroom instruction (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011). By juggling these dual roles, teachers gain firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities in aligning curriculum objectives with instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of their students (Ryder & Ribbins, 2018). They also develop a heightened awareness of the importance of effective time management, prioritization, and collaboration with colleagues to ensure a balanced approach to their responsibilities. Through this experience, teachers gain insights into their own strengths, areas for growth, and the importance of ongoing professional development to enhance their curriculum leadership skills (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). These insights ultimately contribute to their professional growth and their ability to make informed decisions that positively impact student learning outcomes.

On the coping mechanisms of classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in performing their dual functions, one of the themes that was shown was setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks. Classroom teachers cope with their dual roles by setting clear boundaries and prioritizing tasks based on importance and urgency. They establish limits on their time and energy, ensuring that they allocate sufficient attention to both their classroom instruction and curriculum head responsibilities. The second theme identified was seeking support and mentorship, as classroom teachers cope with the challenges of balancing their roles by seeking support and mentorship from experienced colleagues or instructional leaders. They turn to mentors who have successfully navigated similar dual roles to gain guidance, advice, and strategies for managing their responsibilities. The third theme identified was time blocking and task chunking. Classroom teachers cope with their dual roles by using time blocking and task chunking techniques. They dedicate specific blocks of time to focus on different aspects of their responsibilities, such as planning lessons, assessing student work, and curriculum development. Fourth, seeking professional development opportunities in curriculum leadership. Classroom teachers cope with the challenges of being curriculum heads by actively seeking professional development opportunities specifically focused on curriculum leadership. They attend workshops, conferences, and training sessions that enhance their knowledge and skills in curriculum design, assessment, and implementation.

On the educational management insights gained from classroom teachers assigned as curriculum heads in performing their dual functions, the first theme identified was strengthening collaborative skills. Teachers recognize the value of collaboration and teamwork in curriculum development. They gain insights into the benefits of working with colleagues, sharing ideas, and engaging in collaborative problem-solving to enhance curriculum design and implementation.

The second theme identified was adapting to changing education. Balancing the roles of a classroom teacher and a curriculum head exposes teachers to evolving educational trends and approaches. They gain insights into new instructional methodologies, technology integration, and innovative practices, allowing them to adapt and stay current in a rapidly changing educational landscape.



The third theme was strengthening leadership skills. The experiences of classroom teachers in balancing their roles as curriculum heads contribute to the development of leadership skills. They gain insights into effective communication, decision-making, and collaboration, enabling them to lead curriculum development initiatives, mentor colleagues, and contribute to educational improvement efforts.

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#### **AUTHOR'S PROFILE**



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The author is 41 years old, married, born on August 26, 1982, at Tibungco, Davao City, Philippines. She is currently living at Phase 3 Panacan, Davao City. She has a 10-year-old daughter and supportive husband. She is currently connected in F. Bustamante National High School in Tibungco, Davao City. She finished her Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education Major in Social Science at Holy Cross of Davao College Inc., located in Sta. Ana Avenue Davao City. She graduated from this college with flying colors in 2005. After she graduates, she decides to enter the corporate world. Throughout various corporate work experiences, she has encountered a wide array of challenges and triumphs. She has learned the importance of adaptability and perseverance in the fast-paced world of business. For 6 years in the corporate world the most valuable lessons she has learned from her experiences is the importance of continuous learning and growth. In 2011, the call of the teaching profession was on the line. She decided to teach in Brokenshire Science High School in Madapo, Davao City. She resigned as Secondary Teacher in Brokenshire and applied in the Department of Education in 2012. She kept on praying for the school station she wanted to assign to her alma mater in high school. She's very blessed because her prayer was answered. She is now finishing her Master's degree of Arts in Education major in Management at Rizal Memorial College Inc. in Davao City.

Currently, she is applying for the position of Master Teacher 1 in the Department of Education, division of Davao City. She is a Grade 7 Teacher at F. Bustamante National High School, which is situated at Barangay Tibungco, Davao City, Philippines. She is the Grade 7 Curriculum Head, the Credit Committee of Teachers Coop Association, the Board of Representative in their School Teachers Association, and the LG- COMEA Coordinator.