

## Exploring Filipino teachers' professional workload

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### Abstract

Teaching, which is often regarded as a noble profession, is not without sacrifices and time is among these sacrifices. Global data supports that teachers tend to work beyond the official working hours, more than any other professionals in the world. Similarly, teacher groups in the Philippines claim that the teacher workload is compromising the professionals' wellbeing. The main purpose of this study is to explore how teachers get the work done, with emphasis on those professionals working in small barangay schools in the province. However, in spite of such issues, teachers were found to be matching such issues with strategizing, inspired work, and professional commitment. Finally, the paper concludes that while it is admirable how teachers match the struggles with positive attitude, it would still be ideal to explore means of 'getting the work done' without compromising the teachers' physiological well-being, personal lives, and professional self-concept.

**Keywords:** Filipino teachers, teaching, teacher welfare, phenomenology, professional workload

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching is regarded as a noble profession. Some even go to the extent of calling it the noblest of all. As such, it was not without sacrifices. Teacher educators must make sure that the pre-service teachers are aware of the economic hardships and personal sacrifices of teaching while working toward change. Gatens (2016) claim that there are things teachers sacrifice because they want to, and one of this is working for long hours. He went on explaining that good teachers work "outside the regular day" for related duties such as grading student work and preparing for the next day's lesson. "Great teachers" it indicated, are giving extra time to do things right.

Teachers, indeed take extra time to do their job, according to data in many parts of the world. For instance, due to the Workload Challenge, Department of Education (DfE) committed itself to conduct regular large scale research on teacher workload in England Schools. Data on 2018 shows that participants reported high levels of workload, which they believe to be manageable only if they would be working through long hours (or, for part time teachers, if they would work during their "off" days). Reasons for the said workload

include planning of the lesson, marking grades, recording, reporting, and meetings (Cooper Gibson Research for DfE, 2018). Further, study of the data from Trades Union Congress (TUC) shows that 61.4% of primary school teachers worked beyond their official hours in 2014, which equates to 12.9 more hours of work in a week (Wiggins, 2015).

Meanwhile, a research in 2001 by the Price Waterhouse Coopers indicated that teacher work was “more intensive than other professionals” and their “holiday working was widespread (p.6).” Spreading the work hours throughout the year indicates, however that they are not quite different from other UK professionals. Nonetheless, it was emphasized that the intensity and nature of the teachers’ work has to be considered. (Bubb and Early, 2004)

Similarly, in Canada, figures reveal that teachers work about 50-55 hours per week. While variations on work time could be due to some factors such as sex, years of experience, geographical location, the correlation was revealed to be low, suggesting that the issue is a universal concern that affects teachers beyond the state (ATA, 2012, as cited by Froese-Germain, 2014).

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, reports claim that the workload lead to high stress level among teachers. Teacher groups have aired concerns over teachers being overworked. In separate statements, the Teachers’ Dignity Coalition (TDC) and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) Philippines demanded the Department of Education to review the workload of teachers in order to guarantee their teachers’ physical, and mental health. ACT, further asserted that through the years, the teachers’ workload had become more and more burdensome and exhausting with the implementation of policies requiring much effort and ‘non-implementation of those that secure ample rest’ (Hernando-Malipot 2018). Also, being a novice in the profession requires extra efforts in order to keep up with the demands of teaching. It is crucial that beginning teachers be provided with the needed support in the process of becoming ‘competent professionals’. Capability building activities are provided to teachers to enable them to meet the demands of the professions, together with effective instructional practices aimed at student achievement (Ancho, 2019).

There were also instances when teachers get involved in scandal and misbehavior in relation to the performance of their duty. A study by Calderon and Ancho (2018) revealed that mostly teachers “were even found guilty of the various offenses including abuse and corruption. The narratives of teachers show that the profession is indeed worthy of inquiry and research.

However, since the teacher workload is anchored on the expectations of what constitutes teacher quality in the country, which would later serve as basis for their performance evaluation, teachers find ways to get the “work done.” The main purpose of this study is to explore how teachers get the work done, with emphasis on those professionals working in small barangay schools in the province.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This study presents a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that the actual work demands on teachers is a result of factors such as the policy standards and the school contexts. DepEd clarifies the work expectations among teachers through various policy issuances. As clarified by the Civil Service Commission in 2008, through its Resolution No. 080096, teachers are not exempted from the eight hour work day that is required of public employee by RA 1880. As the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers indicates that actual classroom teaching shall not exceed six hours, the remaining two hours could be spent either inside or

outside the premises of the school for teacher related activities. These activities include preparing materials for the lesson, assessment tools, rating and recording, conduct or research, among others (DepEd, 2008).

However, how a study of Ye (2016) indicates that teaching is not static but “interacts with contextual factors and changes in response to the conditions of teaching...The findings of interactions between working conditions and school context suggested how school context interacts with practices and policies, and what conditions are required to support school improvement efforts (p. 145).”

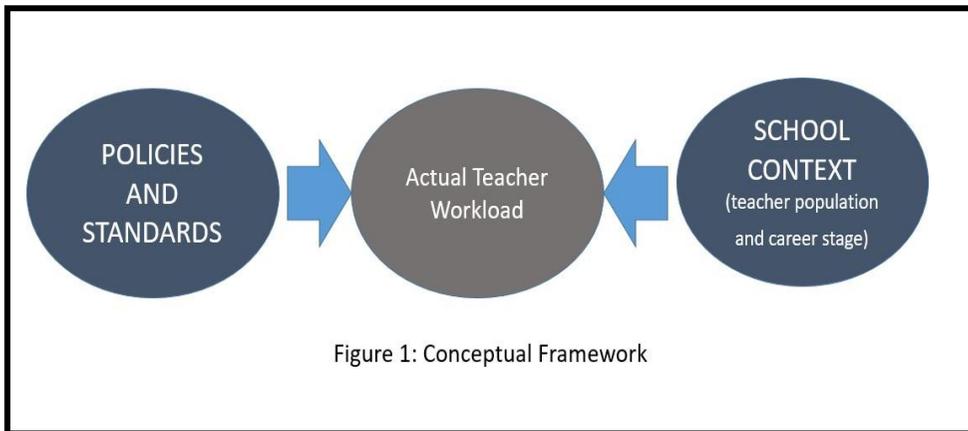
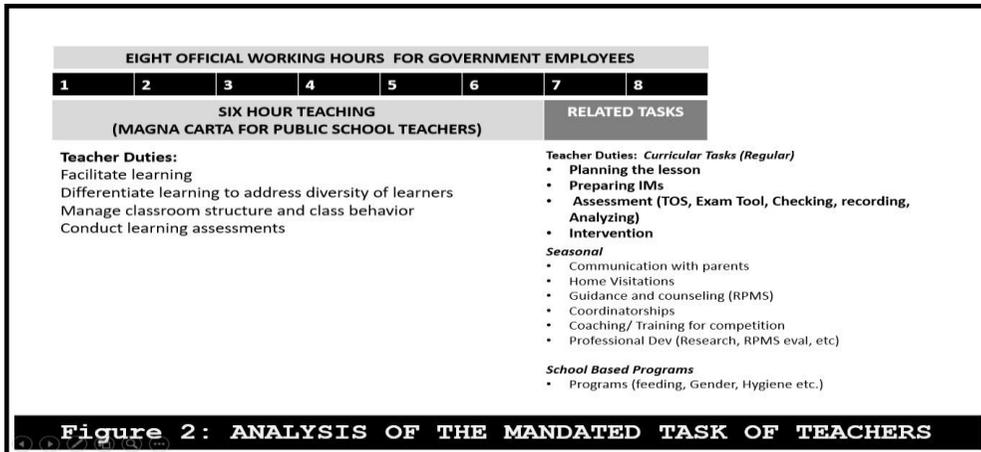


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As such, this study is anchored on the framework that the actual teacher work is affected not only by the changes in the policies and standards, but also by the school contexts.

For instance, there special assignments that must be shared among teachers in a school, such as being a subject (English, Math, Science, etc.) coordinator, reading coordinator, feeding program coordinator, (girl/ star/ boy) scout coordinator, member of BAC, property custodian, guidance-in-charge, member of the Gender and Development Focal Point System, ICT in-charge, among many others. The multiplicity of these tasks must be manageable for large schools. However, for schools with smaller populations of six to ten, each teacher would have to be given two additional designations at the very least. Further, there are also tasks that are not individually mandated to teachers and are therefore not part of their individual evaluation. Nonetheless, as part of the school organization, these would still affect how he/she would be utilizing this two hours such as school-based feeding program, among other.



As such, this study will look into the realities of teachers work, based on the interaction of the policy standards, and context (with emphasis on the population and teachers' career stage).

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research which intends to make sense of the data based on the meanings that the participants attach to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, as cited by Creswell, 2007). Further, what makes qualitative inquiry more appropriate for the study is its emphasis on the interpretative nature of inquiry and sensitivity to the contexts of researchers, participants, and readers (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, this study employed a phenomenological design which explores the meaning that people attach to a lived experience, which in this case is the teachers' daily professional work.

## DATA GATHERING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The data were gathered in 2018 from five participants. Among the data that were collected were the teachers' self-report of their daily schedule through a time table for three days. Further, open ended questionnaire were also developed to gather data regarding the teacher's experiences. Among the questions that were asked were: (1) Are there any tasks that you fail to accomplish within your eight hour workday today? What are these tasks, if there are any? (2) How do you accomplish the rest of the tasks that you fail to complete within the eight-hour work day? Follow-up questions were also conducted through u online interview to provide clarification and further enrich the data.

The data were analyzed for themes that reflect the teachers lived experiences on the phenomenon of interest. Analysis generated three themes which were validated through the review of existing literature.

## PARTICIPANTS

Five teachers (three males and two females) in small barangay schools were requested to participate in the study. The said public elementary teachers were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) teachers in barangay schools with six to ten faculty members

only and single shift; and (2) with rank of Teacher 1 to Teacher 2. Below is the profile of the participants in the study.

**Table 1:** Summary of Participants' Profile

Participant Number	Sex	Rank	Teacher Population in School	Teaching Hours	Special assignments
1	Female	Teacher 2	7	6	4
2	Male	Teacher 2	7	6	10
3	Male	Teacher 1	10	6	2
4	Male	Teacher 2	10	6	4
5	Female	Teacher 1	8	6	3

## FINDINGS

Analysis of the data that were gathered revealed three themes that reflect the lived experiences of teachers in small barangay schools with the workload of teachers in public elementary schools. These themes indicate that teachers are: (1) challenged but strategizing; (2) sacrificing but inspired; and (3) frustrated but committed. These themes shall be discussed in greater details in the succeeding paragraphs.

### *1. Challenged but Strategizing*

Teachers indicate that they find it a challenge to complete mandated tasks within the eight hour workday. All participants unanimously believe that the said time is not enough to accomplish everything that has to be done. As reported by Participant 1, "*It (the eight hour working time) is not enough. There are so much work. We even have to take home some of the work that we didn't manage to finish in school.*" Further, Participant 2 shared that "*The time is not enough due to the number of tasks that teachers need to do and accomplish.*"

When inquired regarding the tasks that usually have to be accomplished beyond the official working hours, top answers include the following: (1) shopping for the canteen and/or feeding program; (2) LIS enrollment; (3) preparing DLL and instructional materials; and (4) reports connected with coordinators.

Further, analysis of the profile of the participants indicates that the teachers are assigned multiple additional designations. The said additional assignments range from two to 10 designations, most of which require certain tasks and reports. As participants number 4 have explained: "*...due to the small population of the school, we have to distribute all the tasks among ourselves...*"

However, in spite of such challenge, teachers find ways to accomplish the tasks required of them such as by taking home some of these tasks which are yet to be completed. *"Teachers have so much to do, that we need to take home those that we fail to finish in school, (P. 1)."* *"...we take home some of the tasks and continue them at home (P. 3)."* Further Participant 2 shared that they sometimes need to work late in the evening to finish what they fail to accomplish within the working hours.

While, this strategy that teachers employ to accomplish what they are mandated are getting the job done, it is also quite apparent that it is taking its toll on the teachers. Teachers share that this could lead to stress and illnesses to the teachers who are expending more hours to complete their mandated tasks (P. 1; P.2).

## ***2. Sacrificing but Inspired***

As indicated above, all five teachers find that eight hours is not enough to accomplish what they are mandated to accomplish. This compels teachers to take home some of the work that has to be completed, sometimes, working to the evenings.

However, this compromises their personal relationships, especially with their families, especially as four out of five participants are married and living with their families. Teachers report that due to the work that they need to take home, it limits the time that should have been spent with the family. As Participants 1 and 2 have shared, their duties lead to *"...lack of time with the family."*

In spite of the fact that their work compromises their time that should have been spent with their families, it is also that very family that inspire the teachers to accomplish what they are mandated. As teaching is considered as a stable profession (P5), teachers feel inspired to work through all the demands to provide for the needs of their loved ones. As Participant 1 have shared, *"The reason why we are working even if we are 'loaded' with work is because of our family- for us to provide the needs of our loved ones."* Participant 4 agrees that the family inspires him to persevere in spite of the workload.

## ***3. Frustrated but Committed***

Teachers show frustration that the workload, especially the 'related tasks' tend to be competing with the time that should have been spent teaching the students. Teachers claim that while the core function of teachers is to teach, they believe that they were not able to discharge this duty as they should, due to related tasks that takes the priority due to pressing deadlines.

*"Teaching time is greatly affected. The teacher could not focus on the teaching tasks because of some tasks that has to be accomplished immediately. (P4)."*

*"Although the core mandate of the teachers is to teach, it becomes insufficient because of the related tasks that take the time that should have been spent teaching. (P3)."*

However, in spite of this frustration, their commitment to the same core function of 'teaching the learners' serve as one of their motivators for working through the workload in the profession. As Participant 4 asserted that, *"... it's for the kids and because of the kids."* Similarly, Participant 1 shared that *"It is commitment (that motivates me to keep on, in spite of the demands)....This is for the future of the kids that we teach."*

## DISCUSSIONS

It is quite apparent that the engagement of the teachers with their workload in the profession present challenges, especially with their experiences of having to work over time to complete the mandated tasks. In spite of such challenges, however, the study reveals teachers who confront the challenges, sacrifices, and professional frustrations, with strategizing, inspired work, and professional commitment.

### *1. Challenged but Strategizing*

As the findings reveal, teachers have to spend more than eight hours a day to perform their duties as teachers. As could be remembered, teacher duties does not end with teaching, but required related duties which may be regular curricular activities (planning, preparation of materials, and assessment tool, checking, recording, etc.), seasonal tasks (coordinatorship reports, training, communication with parents, meetings, etc.), and school-related tasks (e.g. school programs and other activities).

This was supported by data from other part of the world. In England, an analysis shows that as compared to other professionals, teachers tend to work more overtime. Study of the data from Trades Union Congress (TUC) shows that 61.4% of primary school teachers worked beyond their official hours in 2014, which equate to 12.9 more hours of work in a week (Wiggins, 2015).

Similarly, in Canada, data shows that teachers work about 50-55 hours per week. While variations on work time could be due to some factors such as sex, years of experience, geographical location, the correlation was revealed to be low, suggesting that the issue is a universal concern that affects teachers in states United Kingdom, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Sweden and the United States. (ATA, 2012, as cited by Froese-Germain, 2014).

To ensure that they would be completing their mandated tasks, teachers resort to taking home some of their unfinished work. This, appears to them to be the best strategy to comply with the demands of the workload. Such is consistent with the data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics which reveals that teachers work for more hours, both at school and at home. (Thornton, 2017)

However, while this strategy manages to get the work done, teachers also report that it could lead to stress and sometimes illnesses as they sometimes need to work in the evenings to complete the tasks. This is supported by the studies in Australia, US, and UK, which revealed that compared to other workers and professionals, the occupational stress is highest among the teachers (Bailey, 2013; Education, 2014; Milburn, 2011, as cited by Cross).

In her study of the teachers at the primary level in the United Kingdom, Nias' wrote that stress was reported by many of the teachers. And this which is attributed to variety of causes. In addition to emotional, stress also have physical roots such as when teachers are "drained" (MacBeath, et al., 2009, as cited by MacBeath, 2012).

However, this stress could be contagious, as indicated by another study published in journal, *Social Science & Medicine*, which reported that teachers who are burned out have higher stress levels and are therefore less effective in the discharge of their duties as teachers. What

is more alarming, however is that the study also revealed that when the teachers are stressed, so are the students, as indicated in higher levels of stress hormone cortisol were found in their saliva (Sifferlin, 2016).

## ***2. Sacrificing but Inspired***

As findings reveal, teachers felt compelled to take home tasks that could not be completed in school which could sometimes compromise their personal lives beyond their professional spheres. Specifically, teachers feel that taking home some of their duties in school are limiting the time that should have been spent with their families.

This is consistent with the findings of a study of Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) which revealed that teachers have high overload, and work-family conflicts (ATA, March 12, 2013). Similarly, key findings of an online study of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) in 2014 shows that teachers' stress related to work-life balanced have seen rise for the past five years, with only four percent claiming a decrease. Data shows that 54% of teachers feel torn between their duties at home and school. Women, however, appeared to be more likely to feel this way than males. (Froese-Germain, 2014). Findings of a study that explored the clash in the demands of the professional and domestic spheres of the married female teachers in the Philippines by Bongco and Abenes, (2019) suggests that this could be due to the fact that, in spite of the increased participation of the males in the domestic work (in response to the increased participation of the females in the productive sphere), women still feel that they have the 'ownership' or emotional responsibility over the domestic tasks.

This seems to suggest that while both male and female teachers are affected by having to take home some work that takes time from their personal lives, it could stir more conflicting feelings among the female teachers who believe that their primary role is child care and domestic work, as part of the traditional gender division of labour, in spite of their contribution in productive works to support the family's needs.

In spite of such feelings that their workload is taking time that should have been devoted with their families, teachers feel motivated to work through the demands with their families as a strong motivator. As confirmed by the participants, the family inspires them to work through the demands of the profession that provides them with a stable source of income to support the needs of their loved one.

This is consistent with the findings of Hechanova, et.al (2008, as cited by Macapagal, et.al 2013), that one of the motivators of young Filipino workers is their families. This was also revealed in the narratives of the female teachers interviewed by Bongco and Abenes (2019) who all asserted that the reason that they are working are their families. As Triandis (1994, as cited by Macapagal et. al, 2013) 'the prototype of social relationships (p. 37)' in the Philippines is the family.

## ***3. Frustrated but Committed***

Findings reveal feelings of failure on the participants. They seem to believe that due to the workload and demands, the time that they should have spent teaching the students were compromised. This begets feelings of frustrations among the teachers who believe that their primary duty is to teach the students.

Sadly, this assessment of failure to discharge their core duties could be detrimental to the teachers' self-concept, especially when coupled the result of the formal evaluation that expects teachers to accomplish their workload within the eight work hours. After all, work is an essential part of human lives and comprises an important part of an individual's self-concept (Baron & Byrne, 1994, as cited by Macapagal et. al, 2013) and has great predictive power to how one define self (Macapagal, et.al, 2013).

Zlatkovic, et. al. (2012) looked into the association of teacher's self-assessment of effectiveness in teacher's varied roles performing and their self-concept. Findings indicate that "*self-assessed effectiveness in all teachers' roles is significantly correlated with global competence-dimension of self-concept that indicates subjective feeling of capability for any action and successful performance* (p. 377)." And with Musek's picture of (1986) self-concept as a "*fundamental criterion of personality* (p. 378)" that could regulate and direct a person's behavior and actions, it seems to suggest that such self-assessment of failure by the participants at their core function of teaching, could have influence on their future actions and behaviors.

However, in spite of such frustrations that stems from their feelings of failure at their core function due to competing tasks, participants show strong commitment to the very same core function. Teachers believe in the importance of their work in the lives of the students, and to their future.

This is consistent with the findings of Franco's study which shows that in spite of the negative feelings that a work might induce, Filipino employees still find it possible to find meanings in the work they do (Francisco & Franco, 2003; Franco, 2006, as cited by Macapagal, et. al, 2013). Further the study of Yao, Franco, and Hechnova (2005, as cited by Macapagal, et. al, 2013) indicate that even though Filipino workers are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors, the latter rate higher. This intrinsic motivation for the teachers is the belief that their services have a great influence in live and future of the learners that they teach. This commitment makes a lot of difference in the work of a teacher, as it is a vital element for successful practice. As Mart (2013) asserted, it is commitment to the student achievement that distinguishes a passionate teacher.

## CONCLUSION

Changes in various social, political, technological, and economic spheres, as well as various forces such as globalization, and regional integration are changing, not only the curriculum, but also the standard of teacher quality, which consequently redefined teacher workload. Nonetheless, as members of a "noble profession," teachers find ways to get the work done. How this work is done by teachers in small barangay schools was explored in this study. In the midst of the workload demand, teachers find themselves, confronted with the challenge to work beyond official work hours, need to sacrifice their personal time, and professional frustrations. However, teachers choose to confront issues with strategizing, inspired work and professional commitment. While it is admirable how teachers find ways around the challenges of the workload, it should be ideal, to explore ways of 'getting the work done' without compromising the teachers' physiological and mental well-being, relationships, and professional self-concept. After all, teachers, like all others who labor, go to work, not only to make a living but also for the purpose of making life (Francisco & Franco, 2003; Franco, 2006, as cited by (Macapagal, Ofreneo, Montiel, & Nolasco, 2013). That they are more than just professionals with personal lives, has to be emphasized.

This scope of this study is limited only to those experiences reported by teachers in small barangay schools. While the inquiry does not aim to generalize the narratives of those in the teaching profession, the limitations set by the study were the only parameters that set for the argument and conclusion of the study. Self-reports obtained by the researchers also serve as a springboard for discussion, however it is recommended for future research that related memorandum issued by the Department of Education be explored, along with other pertinent documents in the context of the education setting. Future attempts may also look at the experiences of those in bigger schools in the urban setting, with emphasis on workload-family conflict as a perspective.

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