EXPERIENCES WITH WORD PROBLEM INSTRUCTION IN GRADE 1: PERSPECTIVES FROM SEASONED TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching mathematical word problems in selected public elementary schools in the Compostela East District, Davao de Oro, Philippines. Anchored in Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, the study explored how teachers understand and respond to the instructional, linguistic, and contextual complexities inherent in early-grade word problem instruction. Ten teachers, each with at least ten years of experience, were purposively selected and interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The data were transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers' instructional practices have evolved from traditional, teacher-directed approaches to more learner-centered, student-centered, contextualized, and multimodal strategies. Storytelling, role-playing, visuals, the Concrete–Pictorial–Abstract (CPA) model, and translation into Filipino or the vernacular emerged as core practices. Despite these efforts, teachers consistently encountered significant challenges, particularly students' limited reading comprehension, linguistic barriers, large class sizes, insufficient instructional materials, and strict curriculum pacing. In response, seasoned teachers employed various coping mechanisms, including differentiated instruction, step-by-step modeling, peer collaboration, parental engagement, and creative resource improvisation. The study concludes that effective word problem instruction in Grade 1 requires systemic support that integrates language scaffolding, meaningful professional development, adequate teaching resources, and contextualized pedagogical approaches. Insights from seasoned teachers emphasize the importance of aligning curriculum, instruction, and support systems to enhance young learners' comprehension and problem-solving skills.

Keyword, *Educational Administration, Mathematical Word Problems, Early Grade Instruction, Seasoned Teachers' Experiences, Phenomenological Design, Philippines*

1. INTRODUCTION

Word problem instruction is a fundamental yet complex component of early mathematics education, particularly in Grade 1, where learners are first formally introduced to mathematical problem-solving involving addition and subtraction. Word problems are designed to connect mathematical concepts to real-life situations; however, many Grade 1 learners experience difficulty comprehending and solving them due to emerging reading skills, limited vocabulary, and developing reasoning abilities. According to Fuchs and colleagues, in 2021 early mathematics indicates that successful word problem solving requires the integration of numerical understanding and language comprehension, both of which are still developing at this stage. As early learners are expected to solve basic addition and subtraction problems within meaningful contexts, instructional demands on teachers increase, requiring them to translate abstract mathematical ideas into developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

In the Philippine setting, mathematics education under the K to 12 curriculum emphasizes problem-solving, critical thinking, and contextualized learning beginning in the early grades. Despite this emphasis, both national and international assessment results continue to reveal persistent weaknesses in the foundational mathematics skills of Filipino learners. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 reported that a large proportion of Filipino learners failed to meet minimum proficiency levels in mathematics, indicating significant gaps in their ability to interpret and apply mathematical concepts in contextualized tasks. Supporting this claim, Luna and team in 2023 found a significant relationship between reading comprehension and mathematical word problem-solving performance among Filipino elementary learners, underscoring the interdependence of literacy and mathematics learning in the local context. Collectively, these findings suggest that challenges in word problem instruction at the primary level may have long-term implications for learners' mathematical development.

Moreover, at the classroom level, teaching word problem solving presents distinct instructional challenges, particularly for Grade 1 learners who are still developing foundational literacy, numeracy, and fine motor skills. Many pupils struggle with basic tasks, such as writing their names or forming numbers, which require teachers to revisit preliminary skills, including writing strokes and number formation, before engaging learners in higher-order mathematical tasks. By the latter part of the school year, when instructional focus shifts toward solving word problems, a considerable number of learners continue to lack the reading comprehension and reasoning abilities necessary to understand problem situations. As a result, instructional practices may become constrained by time limitations and curriculum demands, leading teachers to rely on surface-level strategies, such as identifying keywords or using question marks, rather than fostering deep conceptual understanding. In some instances, learners are provided with answers without fully engaging in the problem-solving process.

Furthermore, despite persistent concerns regarding learners' foundational mathematics skills, limited attention has been given to how experienced teachers navigate the instructional, contextual, and developmental challenges of teaching word problems in the early grades. Addressing this gap is essential, as seasoned teachers possess accumulated pedagogical knowledge shaped by years of classroom practice. This study, therefore, aims to explore the lived experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching word problems, with the goal of generating insights that can inform instructional practices, professional development initiatives, and curriculum enhancements. To realize this, the results of the study will be presented to the teachers and administrators. Through this, it is hoped that initial actions will be made relevant to the result of the study. Finally, the completed paper will be presented to research conferences and reviews, and it is hoped to be submitted for publication to reach broader range of readers.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. According to Pathak and team in 2013, a qualitative method was employed to explore individuals' beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions, yielding data that were non-numerical in nature. It sought to understand the underlying meanings, perspectives, and motivations behind human actions, focusing on the question of why. As Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, phenomenological research was particularly suited to exploring the essence of shared experiences through participants' narratives. Giorgi (2009) underscored the importance of applying systematic procedures in analyzing phenomenological data to ensure both rigor and authenticity.

The researcher considered this design the most appropriate for the study, as phenomenology enables qualitative researchers to understand how individuals perceive their experiences, focusing on how they respond to situations, construct their realities, assign meaning to events, reflect on stages of life, and navigate transitions. These lived experiences provided meaning to everyone's perspective, shaped by both internal and external factors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

2.2 Research Locale

The origin of Compostela's name is not documented, but renowned people speculate that it was a transient Spanish hamlet known as a "Kampo de Kastila" that originated from the Eastern Coast of Davao Oriental. Another account presents that a Spanish friar from the East Coast arrived at the location, bringing along a statue of Senior Santiago de Apostol, the patron saint of his hometown Compostela, Spain. As a result, the place was named Compostela.

Compostela is a municipality located inland in the province of Davao de Oro, which is situated along the coast. The municipality covers a surface area of 287.00 square kilometers or 110.81 square miles, accounting for 6.29% of the total area of Davao de Oro. The population, estimated through the 2024 Census, was 89,224. This accounted for 11.4% of the entire population of Davao de Oro province, or 1.66% of the total population of the Davao Region. The population density is calculated to be 313 individuals per square kilometer or 811 individuals per square mile, based on these numbers. Viewpoint, Astoria Farm Resort, Salinas Ridge, Kapehan, San Miguel Spring Resort, Tambuyong Forest & Kumakaykay Falls, and Balai Mila – Hot Spring & Farm are some of the tourist attractions found in Compostela.

The schools that will be participating in this study are the Compostela Central Elementary School SPED Center, Ngan Elementary School, TH Valderama Elementary School, Bongkilaton Integrated School, Mangayon Elementary School, Diosdado Elementary School, and Bango Elementary School.

2.3 Research Participants

The research informants of the present study were the 10 seasoned grade 1 teachers from DepEd Davao de Oro Division – Compostela East District Office. In this study, purposive sampling was used by Patton, M. Q. (2015), a non-probability technique in which sample elements were chosen based on the researcher's judgment and from the recommendation of the principals or supervisor. To ensure the appropriateness of employing purposive sampling and to achieve comprehensive insights, the included participants were currently teaching Grade 1 during the 2025–2026 school year, possessed at least ten years of teaching experience, and were assigned to the Compostela East District, Province of Davao de Oro. In addition, teachers with less than 10 years of experience in teaching grade 1 were excluded.

2.4 Research Questions

Corresponding to the qualitative research design, the study aims to uncover the lived experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching mathematical word problems in selected public elementary schools in Compostela, Davao de Oro. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions.

1. What are the experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching mathematical word problems?
2. What strategies do seasoned Grade 1 teachers use when teaching mathematical word problems?
3. What challenges do seasoned Grade 1 teachers face in teaching mathematical word problems?
4. How do seasoned Grade 1 teachers cope with the challenges they encounter in teaching mathematical word problems?
5. What insights can be gained from the experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching mathematical word problems?

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings were carefully analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Furthermore, the discussion highlights the themes that emerged from the data and situates these findings within the context of related literature and previous studies. Each theme was examined in relation to relevant literature and previous empirical studies to determine points of convergence and divergence, thereby situating the lived experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers within the broader body of research on mathematical word problem instruction.

3.1 Typical Day in Teaching a Word Problem to a Grade 1 Class

The emerging themes from this structured theme include seeing pupils struggling, starting class with storytelling and role-playing, asking pupils to make reflections, translating the medium of instruction into Filipino or Vernacular, and using visuals in teaching. The findings revealed that a typical day of teaching mathematical word problems is marked by teachers' observations of pupils struggling, the use of storytelling and role-playing to introduce lessons, opportunities for learner reflection, translation of instruction into Filipino or the vernacular, and the use of visual aids. Teachers' consistent observations of learner difficulty align with the work of Silla et al. (2023), who emphasized that although word problem-solving skills are essential for daily functioning, many elementary learners experience persistent challenges in acquiring these skills.

Despite these challenges, teachers' use of storytelling and role-playing mirrors findings by Bernardo (2002), who demonstrated that contextualized instruction enhances comprehension among Filipino learners by making abstract mathematical ideas more relatable. The use of visuals and real objects further supports the findings of Lubin and Polloway (2016) and Silla et al. (2024), who found that concrete and pictorial representations help learners bridge the gap between narrative text and numerical reasoning. Such approaches also enhance learners' comprehension by making abstract mathematical concepts more accessible and meaningful, particularly for young and struggling learners.

3.2 Description of Approach Changes in Teaching Word Problems Over the Years

The transition from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered, engaging, and holistic approaches reflects broader trends documented in mathematics education research. Teachers' movement toward interactive strategies is consistent with the principles advanced by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2000), which emphasized that problem solving should involve exploration, communication, and reasoning rather than passive reception.

Moreover, the increasing use of concrete–pictorial–abstract sequences align with Myers et al. (2023), who found that multisensory instructional approaches support conceptual understanding among diverse learners. Boaler (2002) and Villarta (2017), reported that enjoyable and meaningful learning contexts increase learner motivation, engagement, and retention. These instructional shifts indicate teachers' growing responsiveness to learner diversity and evolving educational demands, as similarly noted by Mosimege (2020).

3.3 Specific Moment in Career that Best Illustrates Experience in Teaching Word Problems

Teachers' recognition of the effectiveness of visuals, real objects, simplified language, real-life connections, multiple solution strategies, and repetition highlights the importance of accessibility in early mathematics instruction. The emphasis on language clarity conforms with Bermejo et al. (2021) and Dela Cruz and Layson (2021), who identified linguistic complexity as a primary barrier to successful word problem solving, particularly in multilingual classrooms.

Furthermore, translating problems into Filipino or the vernacular supports the findings of Cummins (2000), who emphasized that instruction grounded in learners' linguistic backgrounds improves comprehension and conceptual understanding. Similarly, teachers' reliance on repetition is supported by Cook et al. (2020), who found that repeated exposure and guided practice play a critical role in strengthening foundational mathematical schemas. These findings reinforce the notion that effective word problem instruction depends on both linguistic accessibility and sustained reinforcement.

3.4 Description of One Teaching Approach Often Used for Word Problems that Works for Learners

Four themes emerged from the participants' responses in the one-on-one in-depth interviews. These themes are as follows: using manipulatives and real objects, using draw and tell, utilizing storytelling with visuals, and employing the 4-step approach.

The emphasis of seasoned teachers on the usage of manipulatives and tangible materials resonates with Powell and Fuchs' (2018) assertion that MWPs demand both linguistic comprehension and mathematical reasoning. Providing concrete experiences mitigates cognitive overload, enabling learners to link abstract symbols with physical representations. The "draw-and-tell" technique further supports meaning-making through the integration of visual and verbal elements, consistent with the multimodal learning approach of Daroczy et al. (2015).

Moreover, the use of a structured four-step process mirrors Polya's problem-solving framework, which follows the process of understanding, planning, solving, and checking, thereby strengthening learners' logical sequencing and self-regulation (De Guzman, 2019). The reliance on storytelling with visuals also connects to Mosimege's (2020) advocacy for Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes multiple means of representation and engagement. Together, these approaches ensure that instruction is both systematic and inclusive, addressing diverse learning needs while supporting meaningful mathematical understanding. As a result, learners are better equipped to actively participate in problem-solving tasks and transfer these skills to varied mathematical contexts.

3.5 Ways to Introduce New Word Problems, Making Them Meaningful and Engaging

Five themes have emerged from this structured theme extracted directly from the responses of seasoned teachers. These themes include using storytelling and contextualizing, utilizing manipulatives, setting word problems in games and groupings, revising through clear terminology, and challenging learners' thinking skills through questioning.

Teachers' strategies for introducing new problems, which relate them to learners' direct experiences, using games, and connecting lessons to community contexts, reflect the constructivist view that learning is most effective when rooted in real-life situations. When learners are familiar with the context or examples being presented, they become active and engage. This claim is supported by Verschaffel et al. (2000), who similarly argue that meaningful contexts bridge the gap between formal mathematics and everyday reasoning.

This approach also supports the DepEd (2016) K to 12 and Revised K to 12 visions of contextualized and inquiry-based instruction, particularly in the elementary level. The integration of play and imagination also fosters motivation, aligning with the study conducted by Navarro (2018), which found that learner engagement directly correlates with problem-solving performance. This means that the more familiar and engaged the learners are, the more effective the teaching-learning process, particularly in teaching mathematical word problems. This is furthered by situating problems in familiar narratives, which enables teachers to activate learners' prior knowledge, a cognitive scaffold that eases the transition from known to unknown.

3.6 Instances When a Lesson on Word Problems Did Not Go as Planned.

Four themes emerged from the participants' responses to the first probing question: learners having reading comprehension issues, lack of preparation and learning materials, lack of interest from learners, and lack of supervision and parental involvement. These themes collectively reveal the complex interplay of cognitive, motivational, and environmental factors that influence the effectiveness of mathematics instruction.

Several teachers recounted instances of low learner engagement, comprehension breakdowns, and pacing difficulties during lessons on word problems. Learners who struggled to read and understand problem statements were often unable to proceed to the analytical or computational stages, resulting in frustration and disengagement. Similarly, lessons that lacked sufficient preparation or appropriate learning materials failed to sustain student attention and hindered the development of conceptual understanding. These experiences are consistent with the findings of Ubah and Bansilal (2019) and Crespo and Nicol (2006), who observed that rigid curricula and limited instructional time constrain teachers' ability to adapt lessons according to students' diverse learning needs.
Moreover, teachers noted that insufficient parental support and supervision compounded these challenges, especially when learners lacked reinforcement at home. The absence of guidance outside the classroom often led to incomplete homework, poor practice habits, and a weaker grasp of mathematical concepts. These external factors further illustrate that effective mathematics instruction requires not only pedagogical skill but also systemic collaboration among teachers, parents, and the broader learning community.

The participants' experiences underscore the unpredictable nature of classroom dynamics and the need for adaptive scaffolding when lessons do not unfold as intended. In moments of instructional difficulty, teachers reported recalibrating their strategies, simplifying word problems, revisiting key vocabulary, employing visual aids, or shifting to more interactive methods such as peer discussions and games.

Ultimately, these instances remind educators that even well-planned lessons can face unforeseen challenges. However, it is through these moments of disruption that teachers exercise professional judgment, creativity, and resilience, transforming instructional setbacks into opportunities for pedagogical reflection and growth.

3.7 Ways Students Typically Respond to Challenging Word Problems

Four themes emerged from the responses to the probing question: perceiving the task as very difficult, losing enthusiasm and interest, getting confused, and giving answers dazedly and with a frown. These reactions encapsulate the emotional and cognitive struggles learners experience when confronted with mathematically demanding tasks.

Teachers reported observing a range of behaviors such as confusion, visible frustration, anxiety, and eventual disengagement when students faced challenging word problems. Many learners exhibited signs of hesitation or avoidance, reflecting a lack of confidence in their problem-solving abilities. These behaviors align with the findings

of Ramirez et al. (2013), who explained that math anxiety affects both the affective and cognitive domains, impairing learners' working memory and reducing their capacity to process information effectively. As a result, even capable learners may perform below their potential when faced with problems that appear complex or unfamiliar.

In response, teachers adopt various strategies to alleviate students' anxiety and rebuild confidence, such as offering reassurance, encouraging peer collaboration, and celebrating small achievements. These approaches embody the principles of positive reinforcement, where consistent acknowledgment of effort and incremental success nurtures learners' motivation and persistence. Furthermore, teachers' sensitivity to students' emotions creates a psychologically safe learning space where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for growth rather than failure.

These observations underscore the importance of emotional scaffolding, providing encouragement, empathy, and constructive feedback, as an essential complement to cognitive support. As Rayner and Pitsolantis (2013) emphasize, learners' emotional well-being directly influences their engagement and perseverance in problem-solving tasks. Thus, by combining emotional and cognitive scaffolding, teachers help students develop not only mathematical competence but also resilience and self-efficacy, which are critical for long-term success in learning mathematics. This integrated support empowers learners to approach mathematical challenges with confidence, persistence, and a positive mindset toward problem-solving.

3.8 Why Teaching Word Problems to Grade 1 Learners Becomes Particularly Demanding

Three themes emerged from the participants' responses, these are: the need for reading and comprehension skills, the complexity of word problem-solving steps, and the need for repetition and translation into simpler language. These themes reveal that teaching mathematical word problems in the early grades is not merely a numerical exercise but a linguistically and cognitively demanding process that requires patience, creativity, and careful scaffolding.

Seasoned teachers emphasized the multifaceted challenges they face in helping Grade 1 learners grasp the meaning of word problems. These challenges include language barriers, cognitive readiness, and limited instructional resources. Many young learners are still in the early stages of reading and language development, making it difficult for them to decode and comprehend problem statements. This situation aligns with Reyes (2018), who observed that comprehension difficulties often precede computational errors, underscoring the foundational role of language in mathematical understanding.

The dual demand of linguistic and mathematical reasoning, as highlighted by Powell and Fuchs (2018), further intensifies the complexity of instruction. Grade 1 learners must simultaneously interpret the language of the problem and perform the necessary operations, a complex cognitive task for children still developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers, therefore, must constantly shift between facilitating reading comprehension and guiding numerical reasoning, often simplifying problems or using visual and contextual supports.

Compounding these difficulties is the absence of adequate instructional materials, which limits teachers' capacity to differentiate instruction effectively. Anney (2015) noted that resource constraints can hinder both the delivery and reinforcement of lessons, particularly in developing classroom environments where localized and engaging materials are scarce.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrate remarkable adaptability and resilience. They act as adaptive scaffolds, designing creative and contextually relevant interventions, such as translating problems into the learners' mother tongue, incorporating real-life examples, and using repetitive yet meaningful practice, to make abstract mathematical concepts more accessible. This responsiveness embodies the essence of constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, where teachers bridge the gap between learners' current understanding and their potential for higher-level reasoning through continuous support and cultural relevance.

In summary, teaching word problems to Grade 1 learners is particularly challenging because it lies at the intersection of language development, cognitive growth, and pedagogical adaptability. Yet, these very challenges also provide opportunities for teachers to innovate and refine their practice in ways that honor both the developmental needs and lived experiences of young learners.

3.9 Adjustments Made When Learners Struggle with Word Problems

Six themes emerged from this structured theme. These themes are as follows: translating English to simple form, adjusting strategy depending on learners' capacity, using real objects as manipulatives instead of plain numbers, incorporating video presentations into traditional teaching methods, providing enrichment activities, and utilizing peer tutoring. These themes highlight the creative and flexible approaches teachers adopt to address the varied challenges learners face in understanding mathematical word problems. The adjustments demonstrate how teachers address linguistic, cognitive, and motivational barriers by making lessons more accessible, engaging, and relatable to young learners.

Teachers reported simplifying language, integrating local and familiar examples, and modifying lesson pacing to match learners' comprehension levels. Such practices are consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction as emphasized by Garcia and Santiago (2020), which promote instructional responsiveness to students' diverse learning profiles. The deliberate act of adjusting strategies based on students' performance and needs embodies the concept of "contingent scaffolding" proposed by Wood et al. (1976) a dynamic process in which teachers provide just enough support to enable learners' progress and gradually withdraw assistance as understanding deepens.

Moreover, this adaptability reflects the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework described by Mosimege (2020), which advocates for inclusive teaching that accommodates cognitive and linguistic diversity. By employing manipulatives, multimedia tools, peer collaboration, and enrichment tasks, teachers create multiple pathways for engagement and comprehension. These adaptive strategies demonstrate that effective instruction in mathematical word problems is not confined to a single method but emerges from continuous reflection, flexibility, and a deep understanding of learners' individual contexts and needs.

3.10 Ways Teachers Stay Motivated Amid Repeated Obstacles

Four themes emerged from this structured theme: seeking support and guidance from colleagues, self-motivation and a passion for teaching, patience and optimism, and engaging in meditation and recreation. These themes reveal how teachers sustain their enthusiasm and sense of purpose despite the recurring difficulties of teaching mathematical word problems to young learners. Their responses reflect a balance between internal motivation and external support systems that nurture professional well-being and persistence.

Teachers described their motivation as intrinsic, driven by commitment to their profession, faith in their calling, and the visible progress of their students. Even amid limited resources and classroom challenges, they found fulfillment in learners' small successes and gradual improvements. Such narratives resonate with the concept of teacher resilience discussed by Masingila et al. (2018), emphasizing that persistence in teaching is sustained by a purposeful approach and self-efficacy, the belief that one's efforts can yield positive outcomes despite constraints. Through patience and optimism, teachers reframe challenges as opportunities for growth rather than setbacks.

From a Vygotskian perspective, teachers' motivation is also socially constructed. Support from peers, mentors, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions functions as a form of external scaffolding that reinforces morale and professional reflection. Collaborative dialogue allows teachers to share coping strategies, affirm their struggles, and draw inspiration from others' experiences. These collegial interactions promote not only emotional resilience but also pedagogical growth, underscoring that motivation in teaching is both a personal and communal endeavor.

3.11 Actions Taken When Students Become Frustrated or Disengaged

Four themes emerged from the participants' responses during the in-depth interviews: conducting a play-based approach through manipulatives, utilizing icebreakers and storytelling, employing peer tutoring, and applying a motherly approach. These themes highlight teachers' sensitivity to the emotional dimension of learning and their ability to adapt instruction when learners experience frustration or disengagement. Such responses demonstrate that effective teaching extends beyond cognitive scaffolding; it also involves creating a classroom environment where learners feel safe, valued, and capable of overcoming challenges.

Teachers commonly responded to signs of frustration by offering emotional reassurance, simplifying complex tasks, and integrating play-based learning strategies. These actions are consistent with the affective dimension of scaffolding, which emphasizes nurturing students' confidence and emotional security as prerequisites for cognitive engagement. As noted by Khoshaim (2020), establishing a supportive and empathetic environment enables learners to take intellectual risks, recover from errors, and re-engage with the task. Storytelling, games, and manipulatives not only

rekindle interest but also provide alternative entry points for understanding mathematical concepts in an enjoyable, low-stress manner.

Furthermore, teachers transform moments of frustration into opportunities for resilience-building. By patiently guiding learners through challenges, encouraging collaboration, and celebrating incremental progress, teachers reinforce growth mindsets the belief that ability develops through effort and persistence. This practice aligns with Powell et al. (2022), who emphasize that resilience in problem-solving emerges through repeated and supported practice. Ultimately, these affective and pedagogical responses demonstrate that teaching mathematics to young learners involves both heart and strategy, balancing empathy with structure to sustain engagement and foster perseverance. This balanced approach creates a supportive learning environment where learners feel valued, motivated, and capable of overcoming mathematical challenges. In doing so, teachers not only support academic growth but also cultivate positive attitudes toward mathematics that can influence learners' confidence and performance over time.

3.12 Things Learned About Young Learners' Approach to Word Problems

Five themes emerged from this structured theme. These themes are as follows: young learners prefer engaging approaches, require motivation and emotional support, need various strategies to accommodate diverse learning capacities, enjoy problem-solving, and take an interest in discovering patterns. These insights reveal that teaching mathematical word problems to young children must go beyond rote computation; it requires tapping into their natural curiosity and sense of wonder. Teachers discovered that learners are most responsive when activities are interactive, visual, and connected to their everyday experiences, underscoring the importance of contextual and child-centered learning.

Teachers further noted that young learners are highly visual, curious, and socially driven, often learning best through play and shared experiences. This observation is supported by Silla et al. (2024), who found that active engagement and contextualized learning experiences significantly enhance comprehension and retention in mathematics among early-grade learners. Through the use of games, manipulatives, and storytelling, learners are able to visualize mathematical situations, explore relationships among quantities, and construct meaning collaboratively. The enjoyment learners derive from solving problems and identifying patterns fosters persistence and confidence, which are foundational dispositions for developing early mathematical literacy.

In addition, teachers recognized that learners benefit from instructional support that gradually encourages independence. Villarta (2017) emphasized that effective teaching requires a balance between guidance and autonomy, wherein structured support is provided initially and progressively reduced as learners gain confidence and competence. Teachers' experiences in this study reflect this process, as they observed learners becoming more capable of applying strategies independently over time. This gradual release of responsibility allows learners to internalize problem-solving processes and develop self-regulated thinking skills.
Overall, these findings emphasize that teaching mathematical word problems in the early grades is not solely about obtaining correct answers. Rather, it involves nurturing learners' curiosity, confidence, and capacity to explore ideas meaningfully. By providing engaging, supportive, and flexible learning experiences, teachers help young learners develop not only mathematical understanding but also the motivation and resilience needed to approach problem-solving with confidence and enthusiasm.

3.13 How Word Problems Should Be Taught in Early Grades Based on Experience

Four themes emerged from the participants' responses in this structured analysis. These themes are as follows: simplifying language and using repetition, teaching step-by-step for better understanding, engaging learners through play and stories, and promoting conceptual understanding through visual and creative approaches. These themes reflect teachers' collective insight that solving mathematical word problems (MWPs) in the early grades requires instruction that is both cognitively supportive and emotionally engaging. Teachers learned that simplifying linguistic structures and repeating key concepts enable learners to focus on meaning rather than mere decoding, thereby bridging literacy and numeracy skills.

Participants emphasized the importance of integrating storytelling, manipulatives, local language, and reflective discussions in teaching word problems. Such practices are echoed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM, 2007), which advocates embedding problem-solving across all areas of mathematics instruction. This approach also resonates with Dewey's experiential learning theory, which highlights the value of meaningful, context-

driven experiences in shaping understanding, and with Bernardo's (2002) principle of contextualized pedagogy, which underscores the importance of aligning instruction with learners' linguistic and cultural realities.

Furthermore, teachers' emphasis on language, visuals, and scaffolding indicates that early-grade word problem instruction should not be reduced to isolated arithmetic drills. Instead, it should be treated as a narrative and comprehension-based learning process that connects mathematical reasoning to lived experiences. Through play-based activities, storytelling, and concrete manipulatives, learners are encouraged to visualize relationships, make sense of quantities, and derive meaning collaboratively. Ultimately, these findings underscore that teaching MWPs effectively in the early grades involves cultivating understanding through integration, creativity, and relevance, transforming problem-solving into both a cognitive and human experience.

3.14 Advice to New Teachers in Teaching Word Problems.

Five themes emerged from the last structured theme. These themes are to be prepared and plan ahead; be passionate and persevere; use an engaging and lively approach; ask for advice and ideas from experienced teachers; and do not limit learners' capacity. These themes collectively reflect the seasoned teachers' belief that effective instruction in word problems is built on both pedagogical preparedness and emotional resilience.

Seasoned teachers' advice to remain patient, flexible, resourceful, and learner-centered encapsulates the professional wisdom gained through reflective classroom experience. As Dibapile (2012) assert, a teacher's preparation, confidence, and ongoing self-reflection have a significant influence on classroom performance and learner outcomes. In this light, being proactive in lesson planning, anticipating learners' difficulties, and maintaining enthusiasm despite challenges are seen as crucial competencies for beginning teachers.

Furthermore, the emphasis on seeking mentorship and collaboration conforms with the study by Navarro (2018), which found that learning occurs through guided apprenticeship, dialogue, and shared professional inquiry. Experienced teachers act as scaffolds, offering both cognitive and emotional support that enables new teachers to refine their instructional judgment and adaptability. Ultimately, this culture of mentorship and perseverance fosters the development of reflective and empathetic educators who are capable not only of promoting mathematical understanding but also of cultivating a positive learning environment in the early grades.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the lived experiences of seasoned Grade 1 teachers in teaching mathematical word problems (MWPs) in selected public elementary schools in Compostela, Davao de Oro. The findings revealed that word problem instruction is a complex yet deeply meaningful component of early mathematics education, requiring more than procedural knowledge. Teachers' experiences underscore the importance of empathy, creativity, and adaptability in guiding young learners through challenges related to comprehension, language, and reasoning. Meaningful instruction emerges when mathematics is connected to learners' real-life experiences, cultural contexts, and linguistic backgrounds, allowing children to make sense of abstract concepts through familiar situations.

Furthermore, the narratives of seasoned teachers emphasize that effective word problem instruction is dynamic and continually shaped by professional experience, collaboration, and reflective practice. Through the use of contextualized examples, storytelling, visuals, and hands-on materials, teachers bridge the gap between abstract mathematical ideas and concrete understanding. Overall, the study affirms that teaching mathematical word problems in the early grades plays a crucial role in shaping learners' cognitive, linguistic, and affective development. By valuing the pedagogical wisdom of experienced teachers and institutionalizing learner-centered, contextual, and scaffolded practices, educational institutions can foster more inclusive and effective mathematics instruction that nurtures not only computational proficiency but also curiosity, confidence, and perseverance among young learners.

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