Learning Gaps and Teaching Directions in a Public Elementary School in the Philippines

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Abstract
The current educational system faces challenges that impact both teachers and learners, including the congested curriculum and varied learning opportunities. This study investigates learning gaps and teaching directions in a public elementary school in the Philippines during the 2024-2025 academic year. Through qualitative narratology, data were gathered from nine grade school teachers to determine factors contributing to the learning gaps and effective teaching directions to improve learning outcomes. Key findings reveal that diversity, motivation, prior knowledge, and learning styles significantly contribute to learning gaps. Effective teaching directions include interactive and innovative strategies, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and monitoring and feedbacking. The study underscores the significance of integrating pedagogy and technology, guided by the TPACK framework, to address diverse needs of learner. Implications for students, parents, teachers, and school administration are taken into consideration, emphasizing personalized learning, active involvement, differentiated instruction, and resource allocation to promote equitable education.

Keywords: Diversity, Learning Gap, Learning Outcome, Prior knowledge, Teaching Direction, Educational Technology

1. Introduction

The pursuit of quality education is a dynamic and evolving endeavor, marked by continuous changes that impact both educators and learners (Afzal et al., 2023). The current educational system faces challenges that impact both teachers and learners, including a congested curriculum and varied learning opportunities. This study addresses the need to understand and mitigate learning gaps to improve the delivery of education. In the contemporary educational landscape, teachers face the challenge of adapting to congested curricula and providing teaching interventions to meet the diverse needs of their students. These adaptations and interventions are crucial in the Philippines, where the educational system is navigating the complexities of ensuring equitable and effective learning outcomes for students.

Bonal & González (2020) underscores persistent "learning gaps" – disparities in academic achievement – that can hinder students' progress and long-term success. Learning gaps can be observed from a multitude of factors, including students' diverse backgrounds, varying levels of prior knowledge, and different learning styles (Milner, 2021; Wade & Kidd, 2019). Moreover, factors such as motivation (Kılıç et al., 2021), socio-economic status, and access to resources can significantly influence a student's academic progress and success in the classroom. Recognizing and addressing these learning gaps is pivotal for inclusivity and the attainment of a supportive learning environment which nurture students to reach their full potential. Moreover, educators' role in augmenting the learners' academic competence and achievement is a vital component of the teaching and learning environment. They must employ targeted teaching directions and strategies that are responsive to the unique needs of their students. These strategies may include differentiating instruction, incorporating interactive and innovative teaching methods (Dhamija & Dhamija, 2020; CG, 2024), providing personalized feedback, and fostering a positive and engaging classroom climate (Valero-Valenzuela et al., 2020). Furthermore, collaborative professional development models, such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions (Verbo, 2020; Correos & Paler, 2020), offer valuable opportunities for teachers to echo best practices with their colleagues which may lead to a collaborative effort to address the challenges they face in the classroom.

This study aims to investigate the learning gaps and teaching directions in a public elementary school in the Philippines, providing insights into the challenges faced by teachers and the strategies they employ to elevate learning outcomes. By identifying the perspectives and experiences of grade school teachers, this study seeks to identify the key factors resulting to learning gaps and to explore the teaching directions that are most convenient and effective in addressing these disparities. The study is framed by the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra and Koehler, 2006), which emphasizes the significance of integrating technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge to enhance the delivery of instruction. The TPACK framework suggests that effective teaching motivates teachers to not only rely on the cognitive aspect of their subject matter but also to consider the utilization of technology and innovative and interactive pedagogical strategies aligned with the needs of learners (Tondeur et al., 2016). The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of addressing learning gaps in the Philippine context and will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers

seeking to promote equitable and effective education which promote holistic education for all students.

1.1. Objectives

This study aims to reflect the learning gaps, and the teaching directions utilized in elevating learning outcomes of grade school learners.

Specifically, it helps in the realization of the following:

1. Identify the learning gaps that affects the learning outcome of grade school learners through the lenses of grade school teachers.
2. Determine the teaching directions provided by the grade school teachers to elevate learning outcomes.
3. Narrate the experiences of grade school teachers on addressing the learning gaps.

1.2. Framework of the Study

Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK)

The TPACK framework builds on the work of Shulman (1986), who was the first to shed light on the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) concept. He paid attention to the problem regarding the requirement of a more cohesive theoretical framework to teachers' knowledge, as well as what they are able to undertake. To provide a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, Shulman (2013) came up with the concept of PCK. He envisioned PCK as crossing the boundaries of the ordinary knowledge on subject content to inculcate ideas on how to approach and deal with special subject matter. Teachers need to go beyond mere possession of content or subject knowledge. It is equally essential that teachers should have the requisite skills to teach that particular knowledge in a manner which is easily comprehensible for the students. Hence, it is the expression of the subject in such a manner that facilitates its understanding to other individuals.

As a progression of the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) framework initiated by Shulman in 1986, Mishra and Koehler (2006) conceptualized the TPACK framework. Shulman (as cited in Young et al., 2013) defined PCK as a teacher's ability to transform subject-matter knowledge into accessible forms that all learners could master. However, Mishra and Koehler (2006) added that it also means that knowing and understanding how ICT may be used to obtain and process information can support learning in combination with PCK. TPACK can be said to be a natural extension of the PCK concept as it incorporates the technological aspect. Hence, TPACK not only stimulates the use of technology in education, but also provides understanding to the teachers about the integration and interaction of technology with pedagogy and content knowledge (Tondeur et al., 2016). The TPACK framework can be visualized by three overlapping circles, with each circle representing an element of teachers' professional knowledge. This framework resulted in seven aspects of teachers' professional knowledge with TPACK positioned at the linking core of these circles. These different forms of knowledge are the context in which teachers obtain and transmit their knowledge.

This theory supports the construct of the existing study which brings out the factors resulting to the learning gaps of the learners and the motivating factors which lead to the teaching directions that mitigate the learning gaps.

2. Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design using narratology as a strategy for inquiry. Data were gathered from nine (9) grade school teachers during the SY 2024-2025 who are teaching varied subjects from different grade levels. Moreover, they all undergone seminars and workshops addressing the demands of the congested curriculum of DepEd prior to the reopening of classes—a significant component for becoming key informants of this study. The teachers shared their experiences, and their narratives were analyzed to understand the meanings of their stories and experiences (Laguitao et al., 2021).

An audit trail was used to deliver the transcripts to the informants in order to verify the accuracy of the data collected. The informants also concurred with the transcriptions and attested to the accuracy of the content given therein as being comparable to what they intended to convey. The information is now regarded as valid and validated.

Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes. Houghton et al. (2016) affirm that thematic analysis involves compiling qualitative data into conclusions presented within a theme framework.

3. Results and Discussion

The Department of Education and the teachers' pursuit to bettering and alleviating their personal and professional growth has been contributory to aiming for a progressive and globally competitive educational environment. However, challenges on the delivery of quality education have been observed over the years which cause drawbacks to the current educational setting.

In order to catch up, a mindset shift is necessary to bridge the accomplishment gap. In order to mitigate the achievement gap, it is necessary to recognize learners' cultural background and experiences in the learning process. Integrating students' everyday life with classroom learning objectives may be contributory to reduce achievement disparity in classrooms (Hernandez, 2022). Teacher education significantly influences the development of the information, abilities, dispositions, and practices necessary for addressing student needs. This is the driving force for teachers to augment the learning condition of learners to reach their full potential.

The study identifies diversity, motivation, prior knowledge, and learning styles as significant factors contributing to learning gaps. It also highlights the infusion of interactive and innovative strategies, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and monitoring and feedbacking as leading teaching directions.

3.1. Learning gaps

Teachers play a pivotal role on developing learners' full potential. They serve as the learners' guide in their interplay with the learning environment as they prepare in facing the real world. In the classroom, where learners are honed, reveals concerns on the demands and needs of these learners. These are factors which challenge the trajectory of their learning and development which could impose detrimental factors on their growth, if not attended appropriately.

Ondras et al., (2023) revealed that teachers encountered observed obstacles like pupils' lack of interest and attention, overlapping responsibilities, insufficient support from elders, students' diminished motivation, inadequate administrative assistance, and the intricacy of students' educational requirements. Hull (2018) also supported the claim, pointing out language gap as a contributory factor. These challenges were identified as posing potential

risks to students' learning, hindering their academic progress and possibly resulting in permanent disengagement from school.

The result of the study yielded the following themes from the teacher participants as the observed learning gaps in the classroom:

Theme 1. **Diversity**

As emphasized on the book of Milner (2016), the African adage 'Start where you are, but never stay there' magnifies a positive regard to diversity. The courage to propel in every challenge despite the situation is a better outlook which emphasize the acceptance of diversity. However, on classroom setting, diversity is becoming a huge factor on the teacher and learners' routine which vehemently affects the teaching and learning process. Diversity significantly influences academic achievement and learning outcomes (Swallow, 2020). The study reveals that diverse cultures affect collaboration and participation among learners.

The following transcripts from the participants cling to the idea of Swallow which identify diversity as a coherent component of learning gap.

> Learners doesn't rely solely on their own. The need to collaborate and mingle with their classmates especially during class boost their learning however, diverse culture of learners affect collaboration and participation. Learners from minority groups often prefer to work together, as do learners from majority groups. P4
>
> Despite teachers' efforts, learners tend to use their native language during classroom activities. It creates an avenue for others not to use the language of instruction during reporting of their tasks. P5
>
> Brotherhood and sisterhood or the 'Buddy' identity inside the classroom transcend until classroom activities and routines. Learners prefer working with familiar peers, affecting classroom routines and growth. P8

The responses above indicate the effect of diversity on the learning environment. They cling to the claim of Swallow (2020) which identifies diversity as a contributory factor to the learning gap of learners. Cultural diversity, language preference, and interpersonal relationship are among the factors which illude the trajectory of learning opportunities.

Theme 2. **Motivation**

Lack of motivation affects learners' performance and participation. Kılıç et al. (2021) explore motivation in the classroom as a contributory learning gap.

The following transcripts from the participants cling to the idea of Kılıç et al. who points out motivation as a coherent component of learning gap.

> Some learners lack motivation to perform tasks unless presented with motivators (intrinsic/extrinsic). P2
>
> Most learners participate only when called upon by the teacher. They don't have the guts to share their knowledge and the push to ask for clarifications on their lessons. P4
>
> 'Learners often respond with "I don't know" when asked to share their ideas during class activities. P9

Prompts to learning are significant factors to keep learners on track. As identified by Kılıç et al. (2021), the lack of motivation or trigger in learning lessen the eagerness of learners to perform their tasks. This leads to underperformance and inactivity of learners during class.

Theme 3. **Prior knowledge**

Insufficient prior knowledge hinders learners' ability to comprehend and perform tasks. Wade & Kidd (2019) underscore the role of prior knowledge in learning and its affect to learning outcomes.

The following transcripts from the participants favor the claim of Wade & Kidd which bring out prior knowledge as a coherent component of learning gap.

> Learners lack foundational knowledge on the lesson. Even with the varied materials presented to unlock the difficulty, there are learners who cannot comprehend and follow the tasks. P5
>
> Some pupils struggle with understanding situations in problem solving. Even when breaking down the complex activity into simple and comprehensive steps, they get fixated with the problem alone. P7
>
> Recitation is often dominated by fast learners, with most learners unprepared. P9

Learners' foundational knowledge is significant to keep going. However, when there is insufficient knowledge on the lesson or task, learners tend to underperform and comprehension is either weak or vague. The responses of the participants then cling to the idea of Wade & Kidd (2019) which intensifies the impact of prior knowledge on the achievement gap of learners.

Theme 4. **Learning styles**

Learning styles greatly affect learners' performance and participation. This is evident on the study of Fariñango Changoluisa & Haro Diaz (2024) which explore learning styles in EFL learners.

The following transcripts from the participants favor the claim of Fariñango Changoluisa & Haro Diaz which reveals learning style as a coherent component of learning gap.

> Learners participate more actively in activities with fewer communication rules. Activities like dancing, drawing, and other illustrative activities most likely catches the attention of learners. P3
>
> The learning style of the learners greatly affects their performance in class. Their inclination is their mere source of participation. P5
>
> Learners are hesitant to explore and step out of their comfort zone. P7

The responses show the interference of learning style on the learning outcome of learners. This supports the idea of Fariñango Changoluisa & Haro Diaz (2024) which underscores the effect of learning style on a learners' participation and performance in varied learning opportunities.

3.2. **Teaching directions**

The well-known adage "practice what you preach" serve as a guiding path to our pedagogical road in teacher education (Ong et al., 2023). Teachers' interventions towards the observed learning gaps provide clear, structured guidance which helps learners catch up and master essential concepts.

The result of the study yielded the following themes from the teacher participants as the essential teaching directions:

Theme 1**. Infusion of interactive and innovative strategies in class activities**

Dhamija & Dhamija (2020) discuss the impact of strategies on classroom participation. They identify Interactive and innovative strategies provide essential contribution to enhance learners' enthusiasm and engagement.

The following transcripts from the participants cling to the perception of Dhamija & Dhamija which intensify the infusion of interactive and innovative strategies in class activities as a coherent component of teaching direction.

> Reviewing previous lessons sets the tone for learners to generate ideas. P2
> To help learners stay enthusiastic, use of educational technology is very helpful. To ensure that they learn and enjoy, materials should be appropriate to the learning objectives and are suited to their language and level of understanding. P5
> Inclusion of illustrations when teaching language subjects to the primary grades and infusing vocabulary building and spelling tasks to intermediate grades keeps learners guided and connected with the lesson. P7

As gleaned from the responses, teachers' intervention through infusing interactive and innovative teaching strategies provides learners with enriched discussions and an environment where learning is fun. A significant component which considers the perception of Dhamija & Dhamija (2020) reliable with the result of the study.

Theme 2. **Learning Action Cell session**

LAC sessions facilitate the sharing of challenges and strategies among teachers. Correos & Paler (2020) examine LAC as a cost-effective development strategy which creates an avenue for teachers to collaboratively solve existing problems affecting their teaching efficacy.

The following transcripts from the participants support the impact of Learning Action Cell session as a coherent component of teaching direction.

> "Sharing is caring" as they say. During our LAC sessions sharing the challenges observed in my class and the interventions employed help learners augment their comprehension level. Working together with fellow experts help boost the learning outcomes of learners. P1
> Openness to criticism and suggestions helps redirect and upskill teachers. Sharing positive teaching reinforcements and learning resources, and open communication are among the keys to augment teachers' abilities and competence. P5
> Sharing takeaways from seminars and workshops helps create an avenue for new insights and opportunities. This help teachers gain positive outlook for professional development. P8

The idea of Correos & Paler (2020) was further validated by the responses generated from the study which point out the collaborative effort of teachers to collectively resolve existing classroom issues affecting their teaching efficacy. LAC sessions provide teachers the opportunity to upgrade, upskill, and retool for the benefit of providing a more efficient and effective teaching.

Theme 3. **Monitoring and Feedbacking**

Gan et al. (2023) examine the relationships between feedback practices and learning motivation. They underscore the contribution of monitoring and feedbacking in tracking learning progress and informing interventions.

The following transcripts from the participants intensifies the role of monitoring and feedbacking as a coherent component of teaching direction.

> Teaching and learning are not confined in the four corners of the room. Additional activities track learning progress and inform added interventions P2

Hands-on activities (video-recorded) are significant learning opportunities. The activity depends on the value they get from the lesson and its impact to their daily living. It is also imperative to inform the parents on the existing activity to help their children execute the activity. P5

Game-based monitoring scheme works best for learners. It enhances their social and communication skill which create an inclusive learning environment free from tension. P9

The responses favor the idea of Gan et al. (2023) which underscore the significance of feedbacking and motivation in tracking learners' progress which will further be the basis of employing appropriate interventions for better learning outcomes.

4. Conclusions and Future Works

This qualitative study explored learning gaps and teaching directions in a public elementary school in the Philippines, revealing vital components influencing learning outcomes. The research identified diversity, motivation, prior knowledge, and learning styles as contributory factors to learning gaps. In response to these gaps, teachers employed various teaching directions, including interactive and innovative strategies, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

The TPACK framework provides a valuable lens through which to understand these findings. The study underscores that effective teaching requires more than just content knowledge; it necessitates the integration of pedagogy and technology to address diverse learner needs and bridge learning gaps.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to teaching which recognizes the interplay between content, pedagogy, and technology. By comprehending and utilizing the TPACK framework, educators can develop essential interventions that address learning gaps and promote meaningful learning outcomes for all students. Further research could explore the specific ways in which teachers develop and implement TPACK-informed strategies in diverse classroom settings.

Eventually, the following are the implication of the study:

Implications for Students

Personalized Learning: Students should be encouraged to identify their preferred learning styles and communicate their needs to teachers (Pratiwi et al., 2024). Recognizing diverse learning styles and prior knowledge levels lean towards incorporating personalized learning approaches in teaching to address the needs of learners in class.

Motivation and Engagement: Students need learning environments that foster intrinsic motivation through engaging, interactive, and relevant activities (Valero-Valenzuela et al., 2020). This fosters the need to infuse appropriate and essential motivators which could further encourage learners to interact in the learning environment.

Bridging Learning Gaps: Students should take ownership of their learning by actively seeking help when they identify gaps in their knowledge. Peer tutoring, study groups, and utilizing available resources can be effective strategies (Erkens & Bodemer, 2019). The

study points out the importance of introspection to learners. Their ability to convey the problems they encounter and their needs to help them overcome these problems.

Culturally Responsive Education: Recognizing and valuing diversity in the classroom can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students, particularly those from minority groups (Glass et al., 2023). The study implies the significance of acceptance and belongingness. Learners' participation to learning opportunities is vital in breaking barriers of diversity which will lead to a more harmonious learning environment.

Implications for Parents

Active Involvement: Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's education. This includes monitoring their progress, providing a supportive learning environment at home, and communicating with teachers to address any learning gaps (Dorman & Dorman, 2023). Parents are the partner of the school in honing and redirecting learners. Their involvement as a support system of the school creates an avenue of continuous monitoring and feedbacking towards augmenting the learners' level in quest for quality education.

Promoting Motivation: Encouraging love of learning, setting realistic goals, and providing positive reinforcement can help boost students' motivation (Zhang et al., 2020). As the immediate environment of the child, the family is their immediate support system. It is imperative for the family to help their family member find for solutions to problems, encourage open communication, and set reinforcements.

Collaboration with School: Parents should actively participate in school activities, attend parent-teacher meetings, and work collaboratively with the entire school staff to support their children's learning. With the meager resource allocation to schools, parents' initiatives to help provide the needs of learners in the school is essential.

Implications for Teachers

Differentiated Instruction: Teachers need to employ differentiated instruction strategies to address the diverse learning needs of their students. This includes tailoring instruction to accommodate different learning styles, prior knowledge levels, and cultural backgrounds (Bhat et al., 2021).

Creating Engaging Learning Environments: Teachers should use interactive and innovative teaching strategies to promote student engagement and motivation (Sawyer, 2019). This can include incorporating technology, games, and hands-on activities into their lessons (Dhamija & Dhamija, 2020).

Utilizing Learning Action Cells (LAC): LAC sessions provide a valuable platform for teachers to collaborate, share best practices, and develop strategies for addressing learning gaps (Correos & Paler, 2020; Verbo, 2020). Teachers' collaboration to mitigate learning gap is the common goal of LAC sessions. Sharing of the applicable and accessible learning platforms and teaching materials, relating practices which work for their class, and even re-echoing their takeaways from their attended seminars and

workshops will create multiple options to all teachers when addressing these learning gaps.

Effective Monitoring and Feedback: Regular monitoring and feedbacking are vital for tracking student progress and identifying areas for further improvement and additional support (Gan et al., 2023; Lee, 2017). Feedback should be set timely, specific, and actionable.

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Awareness of the cultural backgrounds of students and incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into their instruction is significant for teachers to create a more inclusive learning environment (Carey et al., 2018; Hernandez, 2022; Wilson, 2016). Teachers should exercise the value of inclusivity in class through incorporating learning opportunities which are inclusive and nurturing.

Implications for the Administration

Professional Development: The administration should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills in differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and the use of interactive and innovative teaching strategies (Confesor & Belmi, 2022). Teachers' continuing development through pursuing their master's and doctorate degree could further boost their teaching competency. Their attendance to seminars, workshops, and conferences is a vital way of upskilling, updating, and even retooling.

Resource Allocation: The administration should allocate resources to support teachers in addressing learning gaps, particularly on providing access to technology, procurement of instructional materials, and additional support staffs (who will perform technical activities) to help provide the needs of learners.

Parent and Community Engagement: The administration should actively engage parents and the community in supporting student learning. This can include offering workshops for parents, creating volunteer opportunities, and partnering with local organizations (Dorman & Dorman, 2023). Invitation and involvement of the community in related activities help strengthen the foundation and relation of the school with the community.

By addressing these implications, schools can create a more equitable and supportive learning environment that helps learners work on their own, collaborate in the learning environment, and create an avenue of positive learning practices to reach their full potential.

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