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Delving into the Integration of Research Subjects in the Junior High School Curriculum from the Learners' Point of View

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Abstract

Aim: This phenomenological research explored into the learners' experiences to inquire into the integration of research subjects in the junior high school curriculum.

Methodology: The study made use of a researcher-developed semi-structured, open-ended interview guide in the in-depth interviews with the participants. Data gathered were analyzed via thematic analysis.

Results: Over all findings show that students become more critical thinkers; they learn to use data in decision-making. They rely on data-driven decision as it is realized through the so-called culture of research in the junior high school level. However, despite the benefits of research, the participants also face a lot of challenges with include the complexities of and time-required in research possesses, expenses and lack of financial support, uncooperative teammates or issues in groupings, some untrained teachers, pressure for some students, lack of experience and overlapping of activities.

Conclusion: While the government has opened another opportunity for students to learn better through the integration of research subjects in the junior high school and the enabling of the culture of research, the study concludes that certain challenges are also being encountered by the students which necessitate immediate attention and consideration. The study recommends that SHS students be fully supported and assisted in their research journey as this not an easy one. School authorities, teachers, parents and other stakeholders shall unite for the ultimate benefits of the students.

Keywords: Research, Junior High School, Integration, Basic Education

INTRODUCTION

Research undertakings are indispensable nowadays (Dizon & Sanchez, 2020; Mauser, et al., 2013; Regala, 2019). Without research, Reardon, et al. (2019) posited that there can also be no innovations to begin with. Scientific investigations and initiatives are also valid because of the exercise or utilization of certain research knowledge and skills (Mullinix, et al., 2015). The newest products and the latest developments and innovations in technology are enjoyed by people because of research (Ardito, et al., 2015). Policy makers around the world are also guided by research (Cartwright & Hardie, 2012). Overall, the gains and benefits of research can no longer be denied. People nowadays live in a culture of research where people's initiatives and measures are all guided by research findings (Morales, 2016; Ulla, Barrera & Acompañado, 2017; Hine, 2013; Cruz, 2010; Hugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010; Burns, 2010). Without a doubt, research, with all its benefits and with all the opportunities it gives to people, has nothing to prove anymore (Jagosh, et al., 2012). People who still question the gains and benefits of research may still be blinded by their belief that their lives are guided by either the 'stars in the heavens' or by certain superstitious beliefs rather than the evidence categorically and openly presented to them (Kyratsis, Ahmad & Holmes, 2012). They still do not see the fact that nowadays, policies and decisions have no other roots and inspiration except research findings (Ulla, et al., 2017; Hill & Haigh, 2011; Shamai & Kfir, 2010; Hanover Research, 2014; Salendab & Cogo, 2022). The culture of research has a critical role in the basic education and all students and teachers especially in the senior high school should engage in it (Tindowen, 2018; Regala, 2019; Sanchez, et al., 2022). With this overwhelming evidence of the value of research in people's lives, looking at its other side – its challenges - is also a standing invitation for everyone. While the culture of research opens certain possibilities, Grundy (2011) claims that it also results to certain



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challenges and so there is a need to strike the balance between those possibilities and their corresponding challenges. This is especially true and applicable in the emphasis of the present study – the case of the junior high school (SHS) learners of the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd). It can be recalled that through the enactment into law of Republic Act (RA) No. 10533 or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, or simply the K to 12 Law, DepEd integrated in the junior high school curriculum research subjects. Through the present inquiry, DepEd will be able to understand better the journey of its learners and in turn, the agency can further improve the implementation of its programs and the teaching-learning process in the said learning area which will ultimately benefit the education system in general.

With the above-mentioned premises, the researchers, being research teachers themselves, were motivated to conduct this study and to address the research gap as elucidated and built in the succeeding paragraphs – the review of related literature and studies from international, national and local contexts.

This review might be of great help in furthering the unique place of this undertaking in the field of educational research and in further elucidating the very reasons for its conduct.

The K to 12 Law: From International Inspiration to Philippine Adaptation

Research in the Philippine basic education curriculum is not something new as certain junior high school subjects (e.g. English, Science, etc.) have already been integrating research topics or competencies even before the advent of the senior high school. It can also be noted that in the Special Science Classes (SSC) which are implemented in selected schools, specific research subjects have already been offered and integrated. However, the teaching of research subjects in the basic education nowadays has become more comprehensive when the Philippine Congress enacted into law RA No. 10533, otherwise known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013. Known as the senior high school years, the additional two years (Grades 11 and 12) as mandated in the said statute has also introduced to the Filipino learners research subjects which include qualitative research (Practical Research 1), quantitative research (Practical Research 2), Inquiries, Investigations and Immersion (3I's) and the Research Capstone Project. Since these research subjects and the senior high school itself are a product of RA 10533, a review of the said law becomes indispensable in further understanding the purposes of teaching the said subjects in the SHS level.

The enactment of the Philippine K to 12 Law can be linked to foreign inspirations and influences, as supporters and dissenters, respectively, call it (Sanchez, 2020). Citing the initiatives from more than 140 countries, Sarvi, Munger and Pillay (2015) claimed that the K to 12 set-up (one year kindergarten and 12 years of primary and secondary education) has become the international norm for pretertiary education and that more countries have been acknowledging its benefits. Fioriello (2019) wrote that USA, Australia, Singapore, Canada, India, Japan, China and Germany are also some of the foreign countries that are under the K to 12 system. This 12-year school education cycle was also undertaken stepwise between 2007 and 2015 in Mongolia (Gansukh, 2015). Other states and countries which include Ontario, Canada (Donohoo, 2013), Poland (Government of Poland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011) and Turkey (Education Reform Initiative, 2014) have also began their educational reform using the said cycle of education system.

In the Philippines, the K to 12 program became a landmark reform of the Philippine government (Alonzo, 2015; Muñoz & Sanchez, 2023; Regala, 2020). It mandated in the basic education a one-year kindergarten and the addition of two more years in high school making it 12 years from the primary to the secondary education. The same study furthered that with the K to 12 program, the country became compliant to international standards in so far as the basic education is concerned. It also claimed that with the new system, the practice of offering remedial or foundation subjects at the tertiary level will be discontinued as the senior high school graduates are now college ready. This is also the reason why senior high school learners are already taught with a number of research subjects. Through research, SHS learners will be more critical thinkers ready to enter higher education (Cuy & Salinas, 2019; Sanchez & Sarmiento, 2020).

As a review of the K to 12 program, it can be recalled that despite the various petitions to strike down RA 10533 for its alleged unconstitutionality, efforts of the petitioners were all in vain as the Philippine Supreme Court – in its 94-page en banc decision - unanimously upheld the law's adherence to the Philippine Constitution and prohibited further moves to halt its implementation (Navallo, 2018). Since the full implementation of the K to 12 program in the Philippines, a number of studies had already been conducted emphasizing on the said program. In one study which sought to assess the extent of the implementation of the 11th Grade Senior High School Program Academic Track in Science Technology Education Center (STEC) in Basak, Lapu-Lapu City for school year 2016-2017, Acar (2017) and Regala (2023) has proven that there are mixed reactions from the public in the implementation of



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the K to 12 program: fair on the infrastructure and learning facilities, very good on instruction and curriculum and poor on admission and retention.

In another study, Perez (2018) evaluated through descriptive-evaluative method the operational preparedness of senior high schools in Hagonoy, Bulacan. Findings showed that the senior high schools had high operational preparedness to implement the SHS program. However, further analysis also showed that the lack of learning materials and inadequacy of space for classrooms are the most common problems of school administrators in their implementation of the program. Therefore, the researcher wrote, the Department of Education (DepEd) must focus on providing these resources to schools to enhance the operational preparedness of the SHS program. In addition, the researcher strongly recommends the conduct of parallel studies on a wider scope covering other variables which are not examined. It was added that further investigation in the light of the said study should also include the description of the full implementation of SHS program in relation to the areas of students' specialization under the different tracks/strands offered in the SHS program. The same study furthered that an emphasis on instruction or a focus on a specific learning area or a subject in the senior high school would be a good piece of research to be conducted about the program.

In another research focusing on the implementation of the K to 12 program, specifically in the Technical, Vocational Livelihood (TVL) Track, Rusiana and Flores (2019) investigated on the level of availability of equipment and tools for the effective teaching and learning of Industrial Arts-TVL Electrical Installation and Maintenance NC II and Shielded Metal Arc Welding NC II of senior high school in Medina National Comprehensive High School. Results revealed that there were tools and equipment given by DepEd central office which can be found in the laboratory room but are not necessary for EIM and SMAW NC II. This study also invites other researchers to focus on other areas significant to the improvement of policies and implementation of the enhanced basic education curriculum.

Objective

This research explored into the learners' experiences to inquire into the integration of research subjects in the junior high school curriculum. Specifically, it sought to be enlightened with the following:

1. How did the K to 12 program enable the culture of research to flourish in the basic education, specifically in the junior high school? How is this / are these actually realized or implemented in the field?
2. What are the gains and benefits in embracing the culture of research in the junior high school? How do the participants make use of these gains and benefits?
3. What are the various challenges in embracing the culture of research in the junior high? How do the participants address these challenges?
4. Based from the findings, how can this study be utilized to better serve the learners in their journey to embracing the culture of research?

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized the qualitative method. Qualitative research attempts to look into the world of the participants in their natural setting trying to have a grasp of the meaning and essence that the latter provides (Patton, 2005) through fieldwork observations and in-depth face-to-face, open-ended interviews (Mihás, 2019; Sanchez, 2022; Sanchez, 2023a). This method is used in the present study for its ability to look into the in-depth experiences and stories of the participants, an ability which is very crucial in attaining the objectives of the study.

Specifically, this study employed the phenomenological research design. Holloway and Galvin (2016) wrote that phenomenology is a 20th century school of philosophy rooted in philosophy and psychology which focuses on the subjective experience of the individual and seeks to understand the essence or structure of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it. Writers developed different conceptual formulations, (very broadly) descriptive (Husserl), interpretive (Heidegger) and ontological-existential (Sartre) which have been adapted as methods of inquiry by researchers. Phenomenology is the most suitable research design in this study as the lived experiences of the participants as they embrace the culture of research are the subject of inquiry.

Population and Sampling

The participants were composed of 10 Grade 10 junior high school learners from a school in Central Luzon, Philippines. They were selected via purposive sampling.



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Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-developed semi-structured, open-ended interview guide. This interview guide was anchored on the literature and, as a general principle, on the objectives of the study. The initial validators of this instrument were research teachers from other schools while the final validators were composed of three experts in qualitative research in addition to their alignment on the research topic. The specific names of the validators are not withheld in this document to adhere to the confidentiality clause in research.

Data Collection

Data collection was done via one-on-one, in-depth interviews with each of the participants.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers complied with all research protocols in the conduct of the study as applicable in the present investigation.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of data, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized. The aim of the IPA is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meaning, particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants. In detail, the audio-taped interviews were transcribed in verbatim. Responses in the Filipino language were translated to English and validation of the said translation was also conducted by experts in the field.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

On how the K to 12 program enabled the culture of research to flourish in the basic education, specifically in the junior high school

When the participants were asked on how they think the K to 12 program enabled the culture of research to flourish in the basic education, specifically in the junior high school, one theme emerged from the data. Said theme points out that through the implementation of the K to 12 program, junior high school students become more critical thinkers; they learn to use data in decision-making. This dependence on research can be seen as the research subjects are included and integrated in almost all subjects in the basic education. This theme is anchored on the participants' individual responses. It can be recalled that in the advent of the K to 12 program by virtue and mandate of Republic Act 10533, or the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, a number of research subjects has been included in the basic education curriculum. As can be observed, there is dependence or reliance on the value of research (Alonzo, 2015). This is manifested in the basic education school's use of research to develop their students (Acar, 2017; Sanchez, 2023b). The K to 12 program enabled the culture of research to flourish in the basic education as can be seen in the said reliance to evidence-based decision making (Morales, 2016) and the inculcation of the value of critical thinking among students (AlGhamdi, et. al, 2014; Salendab & Dapitan, 2021). The dependence or reliance on research can also be observed as various research subjects are now part of the everyday culture and interactions among the students and school personnel. Having said the aforementioned premises, it can be stated that the K to 12 program did not only change the educational landscape in the basic education. It also changed the way students think and value the data presented to them. Students learn to be careful in arriving at a decision (Shamai & Kfir, 2010; Salendab & Dapitan, 2020). The K to 12 program enabled a culture of research where students, and even school personnel, rely solely on data and evidence and where policies and their implementation are guided by research findings.

On how the culture of research is actually realized or implemented in the field/school

When asked on how the culture of research is actually realized or implemented in the field/school, the theme that research is everywhere emerged. It furthered that the culture of research is realized or implemented by the presence of various research activities in the school and this is also seen through the teaching of the best research teachers that students have. The culture of research is manifested through the presence of research in almost all activities and in almost parts of the life of students. Research is everywhere (Grima-Farrell, 2017; Salendab, 2021; Salendab & Dapitan, 2021). There is no longer a part or discipline where research and the utilization



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of research findings are inexistent. So as obviously observed in the basic education nowadays, this research culture can no longer be denied (Ulla, Barrera & Acompañado, 2017). In fact, this culture can also be seen through the teaching of the best research teachers that students have. It is not a surprise that research teachers nowadays are really trained and given seminars for them to be able to do their jobs as research teachers (Grundy, 2011) given the subject is quite hard, especially for newly hired teachers (Hine, 2013). From the classrooms, the various research activities in the school, research oral presentations, almost everything deals about research. Through all of these things, the culture of research is truly enabled in the K to 12 program.

On the gains and benefits in embracing the culture of research in the senior high school

Research has a lot of benefits to students. It develops students' skills and talents. This is the resounding theme for the inquiry on the gains and benefits in embracing the culture of research in the senior high school. The gains and benefits of research are well-noted in the present study as they also resound from the responses of the participants. The participants are well aware that research has a lot of benefits in terms of improving students academically, in improving their various skills and in improving their personality as well. In academics, students' critical thinking and regard to evidence and data also reflect in their achievements in academics. Their skills and talents in communication, in properly listening to and evaluating data, in their use of credible sources and materials for their research projects, among others, are indeed manifestations of what research is doing to them (Cottrell, 2017). Their personality is also being developed and enhanced by research through their interactions with a lot of people: teachers, groupmates, panelists and other persons who are involved in the research process. Through research, students are able to do its processes with due regard to following protocols such as respect for authority, adherence to ethics in research, and other research protocols (Suter, 2011).

On how the participants make use of the gains and benefits of research

When asked on how the participants make use of the gains and benefits of research, this theme emerged from the data: students make use of the benefits of research through varied ways like learning academically and as a person, embracing change and application of learning in daily living. Research prepares students in college life. Learning in academics serve as an indispensable benefit of research (Guo, et. al, 2012). There is also acknowledgement of how it improves the person personally (Walsh & Sattes, 2017). In the present discussion, the participants are to be commended for realizing how research can be used for innovations and embracing of changes. As change is the only permanent in this world (Dizon & Sanchez, 2020), students should also see how research can be beneficial through the introduction of various changes and innovations in acquiring and utilizing knowledge for the benefits of the society (Bernhardt, 2017). The participants are also commended for acknowledging or recognizing that research and the learning that can be gained from it shall be applicable to one's daily life (Ellis & Loughland, 2016). After all, learning is said to be inutile or useless unless there is an application of it in real life. Without usage, proper usage at that, of knowledge acquired through research, the whole process and purpose in conducting research becomes useless also (Cruz, 2010).

On the various challenges in embracing the culture of research

The participants were also asked on the various challenges in embracing the culture of research. The emerging theme from the said inquiry states that there are a number of challenges faced by students in embracing the culture of research. These include, among others, the complexities of and time-required in research possesses, expenses and lack of financial support, uncooperative teammates or issues in groupings, untrained teachers, pressure for some students, lack of experience and overlapping of activities.

While appreciating and recognizing the various gains and benefits of research, the accompanying challenges must also be acknowledged (Burns, 2010). In fact, in the same way that those gains and benefits serve as strengths, the challenges in the research process and its culture serve as areas for improvements and further developments. Only when the strengths and areas for improvements are both recognized can an effective and successful program be achieved (Sanchez & Sarmiento, 2020). The participants agree that there are a number of challenges faced by students in embracing the culture of research. These include, among others, the complexities of and time-required in research possesses, expenses and lack of financial support, uncooperative teammates or issues in groupings, untrained teachers, pressure for some students, lack of experience and overlapping of activities. Research subject is a complex one. It requires serious attention because of the rigor in how it is conducted and written as well. In fact, most students find research as one of the most difficult subjects (Zott, Amit & Massa, 2011). This is also the reason



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why research can be very exhausting and even frustrating to some students (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Another challenge is research writing is the timeline that students need to follow when conducting research. Of course, no one has to do research for a lifetime, meaning it has to start at a certain point and has to be completed on a fixed time also (Hill & Haigh, 2011). This is specifically true for schools and students who follow a certain period of timeline or timeframe like a school year, or a semester in the case of senior high school students. Because of this set-up, most students find it really hard to complete their research papers. However, this can somehow reflect on their time management as time management is very crucial in being able to complete a research study (Vásquez, 2017). Some participants also made mention of the expenses and lack of financial support in doing research. In some schools, incentives are given to students in conducting research. In the case of public schools, the same support can only be seen in some schools where they offer bond papers and printing for their students, but generally there is no provision of fund for the same. Another perennial problem of student-researchers is the situation wherein there are uncooperative teammates or there are issues in groupings. Some students also mentioned that some of their teachers are untrained in handling the subject. This is quite alarming as the skills or expertise of teachers is necessary to be able to impart new knowledge to students, especially for a quite difficult subject like research. Some students are also having a hard time because of their lack of experience and overlapping of activities for some. With all these having said, it can be observed that concomitant with the gains and benefits of research, there are also a lot of challenges which need to be addressed in order for the culture of research in the senior high school level be really successful.

On how the participants address the challenges in embracing the culture of research

Based on the responses of the participants regarding the inquiry on how they address the challenges in embracing the culture of research in the senior high, this theme emerged from the data: Challenges are addressed through hard work, patience and the passion to seek to know. Help from friends, families and school personnel also matter a lot. Others resort to other creative means needed to respond properly to the challenges.

The participants' challenges are addressed through hard work, patience and the passion to seek to know. Besides, in doing research students should not just consider it as a requirement that needs to be completed but an opportunity to learn (Norasmah & Chia, 2016). Without dedication, hard work and appreciation of what research can do for the students, there will also be no point of doing the same since it will just be put to waste. Passion for doing research is needed as it will make the researchers stand the tests of times, especially the very difficult ones. Help from friends, families and school personnel also matter a lot. With the support of the stakeholders, research life can be easier (Cain & Milovic, 2010). Other participants also resort to other creative means needed to respond properly to the challenges. They exercise resourcefulness and creativity on how they could surpass the challenges in the conduct of research.

Based on the findings, how can this study be utilized to better serve the learners in their journey to embracing the culture of research?

From the participants' sharing of their views and experiences in the implementation of research curriculum in the senior high school, the points in the succeeding paragraphs are enumerated as ways on how to utilize the findings of the study.

The participants agree that the findings of this study can be used as a tool in making the students knowledgeable in the culture of research. This may help the students to fully understand why they should embrace the culture and the principles of research. Also, the findings can address the dilemmas or problems of other students that are hesitant or unsure of the positive things that research can give. It can also be a guide or a source of information for learners of this generation and other generations as well.

Conclusion

From the responses, it can also be stated that this study could be used to open the eyes of the higher officials to see how research does not only happen in between group members and the teachers. They must also think that to provide the learners a better experience they are to provide enough and appropriate facilities that cater to public high school students, integrate researchers to the 'culture of research', allot a feasible time period, and properly train teachers who are knowledgeable to the challenges researchers face in conducting a study.



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The findings of the study may also serve as evidence of common or similar dilemmas faced by the individuals with concerns regarding research. By reading the study's findings, one may identify the gaps within the present culture of research and address the issues and problems with proper and effective solutions.

On the other hand, by knowing the significance or impact of research for their future as well as life of other people, many students will be more captivated and motivated to produce a quality paper. Knowing the challenges faced by experienced research students may help them or guide them in performing their own studies or any future project that they may face. This may then benefit the society and help it grow or develop into a better version of it.

This study will also make other learners and students realize the importance of studying research and further evaluate the economic and social problems that people face today. By conducting this study, the strengths and problems that a learner may encounter when doing research may be analyzed and further recommendation can be given to address such difficulties and highlight ways in which the participants find it easier to conduct researches.

This study can also serve as a reminder that research is a journey in finding solutions and for a better understanding. This will also serve as a guide to help future researchers if they encounter problems. Research has something to do with the students who are engaged and exposed in critical and creative writing, therefore, this will serve as a guide for them to know how to address the future problems and in helping others value the importance of research to each individual as well as to the society.

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