Assessing the Multicultural Competencies of In-Service Teachers

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Abstract—In the Philippines, one of the major problems is providing quality education for the indigenous learners. Research shows that around the world, the marginalized indigenous communities are characterized by poor education due to many compelling reasons. Major attribute to this is the lack of schools and especially teachers who are culturally competent to teach diverse learners. The objective of this paper is to assess in service teachers level of their cultural competence and determine the competencies needed to increase the pre-service teacher’s multicultural competencies. Data is obtained by quantitative method and bares a promising model in raising the multicultural competencies of preservice teachers.

Keywords—indigenous learners; multicultural education; culturally responsive teaching; cultural competencies

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippine’s Department of Education adaptation of the Indigenous People’s Education Curriculum Framework (Department Order 62) has been the answer of the government to uplift the educational status of the indigenous communities [1]. In pursuing a more culturally appropriate and responsive education to indigenous communities, the said curriculum aims to include on its discussion topics that ranges from ancestral domain, the community’s worldview, as well as indigenous cultural institutions. Likewise, respecting the community’s expression of spirituality and strengthening indigenous cultural identity is seen as ways of uplifting the condition of the marginalized indigenous groups.

Since its adaptation in year 2011, a series of consultations and trainings had been done. However, with more than 1.9 million indigenous learners all over the country, the problem of providing quality education is still far from reality. The Department of Education recognized that the government must strengthen the hiring, deployment and continuous deployment of teachers and learning facilitators in the implementation of its Indigenous Education program.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees that everyone has the right to education [2]. In the case of the indigenous communities, such declaration is not enough because in many cases education has become a privilege. The struggle of many indigenous learners is very real for even schools can be an arena for discrimination, and marginalization. The United Nations organization states that the condition is worsened because many textbooks and learning materials exclude them in the picture that means not prioritizing their needs, language barriers and untrained teachers to teach them.

This paper investigates the readiness of in-service teachers to teach children with diverse cultures. While, the very objective is to assess the needs of the in-service teachers to become multicultural educators in their respective school communities, a paradox in the findings is revealed.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

One of the many issues regarding the education of the indigenous learners pertain to the teachers. While many literatures suggest the importance of multicultural education in addressing the gap, still many teachers are not provided the proper assistance and knowledge to hone their multicultural competencies. James Banks, who is a Multicultural education expert highlights the importance of integrating multicultural education into teaching [3]. The five dimensions include 1. Content Integration where teachers use a variety of information from diverse cultures and groups to convey key concepts, principles, generalizations and theories. 2. Knowledge Construction where teachers guide students to understand knowledge creation and how it is influenced by culture and social class groups 3. Prejudice Reduction that determines student racial attitudes and how to modify it. 4. Equity Pedagogy where teachers apply a variety of teaching styles, in line with the learning styles of cultural and ethnic groups and last 5. Empowering school culture that means restructuring and reorganizing school cultures to include and empower “diverse, racial, ethnic, language and social class groups.”

In line with the idea of multicultural education is Culturally Responsive Teaching or CRT. The definition of Gay, Nieto, Bode, Kang and Raible, and Ladson-Billings, Aceves and Orosco explains that teachers who utilize CRT practices value students’ cultural and linguistic resources as capital in knowledge building [4]. Teachers in general uses the student’s personal experiences and interest for instructional connections to facilitate learning and development. Geneva Gay, defined Culturally Responsive Education “as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance and style of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective.” Both
Multicultural education and CRT underscores the importance of culture in education.

In Modeling and Measuring Competencies in Higher Education, a definition of the terms competence and competency is provided. Following the definition of Royce Sadler, the term competence consists of a large number of discrete competencies that can be measurable independently by objective means. In contrast, competency means an identifiable skill or practice. Competency is also described as a complex ability that relates to real-life performance [5]. While, Shavelson identified the six criteria’s in measuring competence as follows; Tapping complex physical and or intellectual skills, Producing observable performance, Standardizing set of tasks, Considering High fidelity of performances as observed in real-world situations, Levelling of performance, and Aiming for improvement through deliberate practice [6].

The main goal in this paper is to pre-assess the Cultural Competence of the in-service teachers in order to determine the needed multicultural competencies of teachers. By diagnosing the readiness of teachers and the challenges of the teachers in becoming cultural responsive educators, a more appropriate model of multicultural competencies of teachers in the context of the Philippines can be further developed.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument was carried out in the Department of Education Region IX in the Division of Zamboanga Sibugay in Mindanao Island, Philippines. In general, the whole Zamboanga peninsula had a huge population of indigenous Filipino learners comprising of the Badjaos, Maranaos, Namans, Tausog, Subanens, Yakans, Kalibugans, Igorots and Bagobos. Chavacano, Cebuano, Bahasa Sug, Kalibugan, Maranao, Samal, Subanen, and Yakon. Ilongo and Tagalog were the two most used languages and dialects spoken in the region. Described as a region with unique values beliefs, religion, dialects, songs, dances and rituals, however the cultural differences and practices often resulted to conflicts and discrimination that made the delivery of educational services more difficult to the teachers [7].

In the beginning, the researchers explained the three-part survey-questionnaire. The first set of questionnaire comprised of four items to assess on a Likert-type four-point scale ranging from ‘very much ready’ to ‘not ready at all.’ The teachers were asked to assess their readiness to teach children with diverse culture in terms of their cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural awareness, and cultural attitudes. The second and the third sets of questionnaire comprised of two questions. In the second set, the teachers were asked to list down the challenges they met in order to increase their multicultural competencies on the basis of their cultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness. The last set of questions pertain to the different ways on how they can enhance their multicultural competencies. The respondents were public school teachers both in selected elementary and high schools in the division of Zamboanga Sibugay.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interwoven relationship between culture and education have been given greater emphasis with the adoption of DO 62. As a matter of fact, Luengo claimed that since the Presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, under the New Society, the educational objectives and curriculum are taken from the context of community’s culture [8]. The classroom practices, method of disciplines was all derived from the cultural material. To Luengo, the indigenous culture provides the values and philosophy of education.

Indeed, the role of culture is crucial in uplifting the education of diverse children. In a report published by the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems, Richards recognized that some tools of instruction may be incompatible with the student’s experience [9]. Summarizing the scholarly works of Banks and banks 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1999, the following specific activities for Culturally Responsive Instruction were recommended. One, acknowledge student’s differences and commonalities. Two, validate students’ cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials. Three, educate students about world diversity. Four, promote equity and mutual respect among students. Five, assess students’ ability and achievement validly. Six, foster a positive interrelationship among students, their families, the community, and school. Seven, motivate students to become active participants in their learning. Eight, encourage students to think critically. Nine, challenge students to strive for excellence as defined by their potential. And ten, assist students in becoming socially and politically conscious. All of these boils down to the role of teachers to become culturally responsive. The teachers had the sole power to utilize materials and examples, engage in meaningful practices and demonstrate values of inclusion. As the report stated, by doing so, “teachers fulfill their responsibility to all their students.”

This part of the paper will answer the following questions:

- What is the degree of readiness of teachers in teaching diverse children in terms of a. cultural knowledge b. cultural awareness c. cultural skills and d. cultural attitudes?
- What are the challenges met by the teachers in teaching diverse children?
- What are the different ways to enhance the multicultural competencies of teachers?

A. Assessing the Teachers Cultural Competence

Following the Model of Care of Josepha Campinha-Bacote, Cultural Competence is considered an ongoing process, consisting of five constructs [10]. Cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters, and cultural desire. In this study, we replaced cultural encounters and desire of cultural attitudes to represent the ‘teacher’s attitude towards the students and the learning process.’ Cultural awareness is thus defined as the self-examination and in-depth exploration of one’s own cultural and professional background. This implied Awareness of one’s own personal biases and prejudices.
when teaching children with those of other cultures. Cultural knowledge on the other hand is the process of seeking and obtaining a sound educational foundation about diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Since the study is all about the teacher’s multicultural competencies, the definition of Bacote of cultural skill is not appropriate, thus Cultural Skill is defined as Skilled in developing and preparing Instructional Materials for diverse learners, and culturally competent assessment tools.

Perhaps to be specific this could also mean “knowing, learning, understanding culture” also considered as big challenges in achieving multiculturalism. Lastly, 14 teachers responded that adaptation to other cultures is one big challenge for them. While the results only mentioned of the three biggest challenges such measure can be used in testing and developing multicultural competencies of teachers.

**Figure 1.** Level of readiness of service teachers to lecture diverse children.

It is also important to note that in terms of cultural knowledge and cultural awareness only 109 teachers perceived themselves as ready in teaching diverse children. The justification for this self-assessment will be discussed below.

**B. Challenges in Teaching Diverse Children**

One of the many challenges in fostering multicultural education is the difficulty of increasing cultural competencies. As mentioned it is a continuous process of learning and unlearning cultural perspectives. Teaching in a diverse classroom necessitates differentiated instructional tools in order to provide culturally responsive instruction. Figure 2 shows the respondents perceived challenges in applying multicultural education perspectives. Fifty (50) teachers perceived that the main barrier is the language. This result speaks for the respondents lacking skills in teaching diverse children, especially in the Mother Tongue Base Multilingual Instruction. Furthermore, 31 respondents answered that being “multi-educator in itself is a challenge. While this answer may mean a lot of things to the teachers, this reflect also that they recognize the difficulty of applying multiculturalism in education.

**Figure 2.** Challenges perceived by service teachers in applying multicultural education perspectives.

**C. Different Ways of Enhancing Multicultural Competencies**

One of the many hindrances in developing multicultural competencies is the teacher’s willingness to adapt and change cultural perspectives. Many studies actually supported the gap between theory and practice in multicultural education. The cultural and linguistic capital of teachers can only be developed if the teachers are willing to enhance and further invest on CRT.

Figure 3 summarizes the different ways of enhancing the Multicultural competencies of the teachers. Looking at the data, 23 teachers believed that one needs to increase their cultural knowledge. Cultural knowledge to the teachers meant “knowing, learning and understanding the culture.” As stated above, the importance of having solid cultural background is very important in CRT. Adaptation is considered the second way of enhancing multicultural competencies. While it is not clear what is meant by adaptation in the survey, it could imply cultural awareness on the part of the teacher. Third on the list with 11 responses is attending seminars. This speaks of the respondent’s readiness to understand other cultures and or increase their competencies, this is a positive remarks from the teachers. Fourth is learning and understanding the language, with 9 teachers recognizing the role of language in CRT. This result speaks of the paradox between the challenges met by the teachers yet only nine teachers reconsidered learning and understanding the language. The paradox also proved that gap between what is said in theory stating the importance of language yet minimal importance is given in practice. The other two answers provided were contextualization and knowing and understanding the students, with 7 and 5
respondents recognizing the value of contextualization in learning and putting their students on the top priorities.

The difficulty met by the teacher on the part of cultural knowledge prompts the researcher to conclude that the respondents overrated their readiness to teach diverse students. This could imply the limitation of the study to determine the factors that prompted the teachers to rate themselves as ready. Furthermore, language as the main challenge in teaching diverse children, could mean lacking on multicultural language competencies, thus a paradox in the level of readiness in actual practice. Generally speaking, the teacher’s assessment of themselves may signify problems in the implementation of the K-12 curriculum in multicultural classrooms. The authors believe the teachers willingness to increase their cultural knowledge meant “they are not really lacking in competencies yet they need to enhance and improve their skills in teaching diverse children. Lastly, the issue of language is really a big challenge not only to the teachers but of the learners. It is only when the Philippine educational System recognize the role of language in education, when they can only promote a genuine Culturally Responsive Education.

V. CONCLUSION

The results of our study indicate that the teachers who participated in the study considerably overrated themselves when it comes to their multicultural competencies. While this observation may also indicate the limitations of the instrument used, the way teachers assessed themselves may be attributed to the fact that they simply follow the Kindergarten-Grade 12 National Curriculum. The participants mainly used the English, Filipino and Ilongo languages, rather than the Mother Tongue. Another factor was the diversity of students coming from different ethnicities, and studying the multitude cultural backgrounds could mean additional task on the part of the teacher.

The results also show the tendencies of the teacher to highlight the similarities and generalize the context or content of any lessons. While contextualization either thru Localization and Indigenization could work, language as the biggest challenge on the part of the teacher signifies the lacking of competence, especially in a highly diverse classrooms. As stated above, CRT, heavily relies on cultural and linguistic capital resources in knowledge building.

**Fig. 3.** Strategies performed by service teacher to enhance their multicultural competencies.

REFERENCES