

Building a Relationship from a Man's Perspective: A Case Study About the Experiences of the Only Male Teacher in the English Department

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of the sole male teacher in one of the secondary schools in La Union. The research design employed for this study is a case study. The participant is a male teacher from a secondary school in La Union. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to gather data and employed Thematic Analysis to examine the collected information, unveiling the unique experiences of the only male teacher in the English department. The study identified three main themes. The first theme highlights the advantages of a male teacher, with two sub-themes: a conducive working environment and adopting strategies from female teachers. The second theme explores the disadvantages of being the only male teacher, with two sub-themes: handling all heavy tasks and having limited influence on personal issues related to female students. The final theme focuses on the coping strategies employed by the participant, generating two sub-themes: communicating with peers for the proper distribution of tasks and seeking assistance from a female colleague. This case study illustrates the lived experiences of the only male teacher in the English Department. Based on the findings, a conclusion states that the school should consider organizing seminars on gender-related topics.

Keywords: Male Teacher; Lived Experiences; Teaching profession; Teaching community; Professional relationship

Introduction

Teaching epitomizes nobility among all vocations, with educators often hailed as nation builders. Those who dedicate themselves to teaching bring knowledge, specific attitudes, ethical standards, and specialized techniques to serve humanity. In each educational institution, teachers assume the pivotal role of front-line personnel. Beyond their traditional roles of disseminating knowledge and imparting information to students, teachers play a vital part in shaping the overall development of the entire country. Teachers, in essence, function as human resource engineers, contributing significantly to the nation's growth and progress.

The teaching profession's code of ethics, outlined in Article IV, emphasizes the teacher's responsibility and commitment. In Section 1, it mandates that every teacher actively promotes teaching as the noblest profession, expressing genuine enthusiasm and pride in the noble calling of teaching. Moreover, Section 2 underscores the obligation for teachers to maintain the highest standards of quality education, make thorough preparations for their teaching careers, and consistently strive for excellence in the practice of the profession. Thus, teachers are lifelong learners continuously striving for personal and professional growth. Their contributions extend beyond the classroom, as they actively engage with colleagues, families, and the wider community that effect positive change. Teachers' dedication, passion, and transformative power make them indispensable and deserving of the title of the noblest profession.

In addition, as per Article III, focusing on the teacher's interaction with the community, Section 7 emphasizes the imperative for every teacher to cultivate harmonious and positive relations with fellow professionals, government

officials, and the public, both individually and collectively. Therefore, success and increased productivity necessitate collaboration and teamwork. This principle is especially significant in education, where teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students' learning and development. Establishing strong relationships with co-teachers becomes crucial for fostering a cooperative and efficient learning environment.

According to the study by Smylie (2017) where the researcher stated that norms dictate how teachers seek and help, guiding professional relationships among them. Relationships between mentor teachers and novices often prioritize the maintenance of harmony and support, placing a higher emphasis on these aspects rather than solely focusing on competence development. Follow-up studies propose that enhancing the quality of work relationships among teachers requires substantial professional and organizational transformations. One effective strategy entails creating professional communities, like professional development schools, where teachers actively participate in collaborative, coordinated, and interdependent efforts, cultivating an atmosphere conducive to ongoing enhancement and the exchange of collective expertise.

However, females traditionally dominated the teaching occupation. Through the years, Schmude and Jackisch (2019) noted a discernible trend toward the feminization of the teaching profession. This phenomenon has consequently led to the customary exclusion of males as the prevailing norm in the field of teaching. Such marginalization raises concerns, particularly for males with professional aspirations in the teaching occupation.

Also, Cruickshank et al. (2018) noted that various factors contribute to the decreasing representation of male secondary teachers, with a notable barrier stemming from the societal perception that teaching is predominantly a female-dominated profession. This perspective endures due to the ingrained belief that a nurturing role is inherently a 'natural job' for females. Male teachers face challenges related to gender, including social isolation in schools where females predominate, ambiguity about physical contact in educational settings, potential scrutiny of their sexuality, negative portrayals of male primary teachers in society and media, and uncertainty about the expectations imposed on them as role models.

The teaching community in the Philippines perceives teacher education and teaching as fields of females. As Regalado (2017) mentioned, census data underscores a significant gender disparity in enrolment within education courses, resulting in a pronounced overrepresentation of female teachers. Specifically, the culled data for the school year 2018-2019 highlights a substantial discrepancy, with 89.58% females and a mere 10.42% males in the elementary teaching occupation. The ongoing feminization in the Philippine teaching profession poses a persistent concern, fostering gender inequality and exclusion.

It is vital to prioritize the adherence to the code of ethics for professional teachers. Stakeholders, such as principals and parents, advocate for a stronger male presence in classrooms and the broader school environment. They provide several reasons to support this perspective, underscoring the perceived ability of men to act as positive male role models and father figures, as well as the goal of making school classrooms better mirror their local communities. Nevertheless, men who opt for a teaching career may face challenges related to gender, especially in developing professional relationships within an environment where female colleagues predominate.

In a La Union secondary public school, a unique scenario unfolds where the English Department has only one male teacher. In this context, the objective of this case study is to explore the lived experiences of the only male teacher as he navigates the process of establishing professional relationships within his department. The primary question this study seeks to address is as follows, along with accompanying research sub-questions: How do you build professional relationships with colleagues in a female-dominated workplace, as stipulated in RA 7836?

a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having an only male teacher in your department?

b. What were your coping mechanisms to address the challenges that you have encountered as the only male teacher in your department?

Methodology

Selection of Participant

A male teacher from the English Department at one of the public secondary schools in La Union served as the participant in this qualitative case study. The selection criteria for the participant include being a male teacher from one of the public secondary schools in La Union. The study participant was selected because he is the only male teacher in his department with eight years of experience. Given these participant characteristics, he qualifies as the subject for this case study. Also, to maintain anonymity, the participant is referred to by the unique pseudonym "Harry Potter." The study employs semi-structured interviews and observations to provide a detailed description of the case.

Setting

The research is within the premises of a secondary public school located in La Union. This educational institution, situated in an urban environment, is classified as a large school, accommodating both junior high school and senior

high school divisions. Within this educational landscape, the participant in the study assumes a significant role as the sole male teacher, specifically in the junior high school department.

This school is a dynamic learning hub, housing students from various backgrounds and academic levels. The comprehensive structure of the institution allows for a holistic educational experience, spanning both junior and senior high school levels. Notably, the participant, our focal point in this study, contributes to the academic environment as the exclusive male teacher in the junior high school department.

The school's urban setting introduces unique dynamics and challenges that may influence the participant's experiences as the only male teacher. This context offers an intriguing backdrop for exploring the intricacies and nuances of his role within the broader educational framework. As we delve into the study, it becomes imperative to understand how the participant navigates his responsibilities, interacts within the academic community, and addresses the potential implications of being the sole male figure in his department.

Design of the Study

This study aimed to actively explore the lived experiences of the only male teacher in the English department. Employing a qualitative research design, specifically a case study, we delved into the depth of the research. A case study method investigates events, individuals, or processes in detail within their current environment. It proves particularly useful for issues where the current situation and environment need more detailed insights involving multiple data sources. It allows researchers to thoroughly examine the case by focusing on the how and why aspects (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003, as cited in Erturk, 2022).

In framing this study as a single case study, the researcher thoroughly examined a limited, non-random sample, distinguishing it from other research approaches that might perceive individual cases as inconsequential or interchangeable elements within a population. The single case study design emphasizes a thorough and detailed analysis.

The research design decision aligns with the study's aim. As defined by Creswell (2007), a case study constitutes a qualitative methodology for exploring an issue through one or multiple cases within a specific system. This approach entails utilizing various data sources to depict the case and its themes over a duration. In the context of this study, the research approach involves conducting an in-depth investigation into the lived experience of the solitary male teacher in the English Department. The case study specifically concentrated on an individual within a group or unit to generalize across multiple units. The study employed semi-structured interviews, providing a detailed description of the chosen case and the lived experience of the only male teacher in the English Department. This research approach facilitated an in-depth understanding and exploration of the case under study.

Data Sources

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the data-gathering instrument. The researcher added the actual questions and follow-up probes from the guide to provide clarity throughout the interview regarding the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of the only male English teacher in the department. The interview guide featured one main question focusing on the lived experiences of building professional relationships for the only male English teacher in the English department, accompanied by two probing questions. The first probing question centered on the advantages and disadvantages of being the only male teacher, while the second question focused on the coping mechanisms to address the challenges within the English Department.

For the main question, "How do you build professional relationships with colleagues in a female-dominated? While the probing questions are a. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the only male teacher in a female-dominant department? And b. What were your coping mechanisms to address the challenges that you have encountered as the only male teacher in your department?

Before the interview, the researcher presented the interview guide questions to the Head Teacher and Master Teacher II of the English Department for validation. The data-gathering procedure involved a face-to-face interview using the validated semi-structured interview guide. Furthermore, the researcher obtained permission from the School Principal through a letter before conducting the interview. Direct permission was also sought from the teacher using a consent letter, which included inquiries about availability and the most convenient time for the interview. Carefully managing scheduling helped avoid intrusion into the teacher's work and personal time. The researcher personally conducted the data collection process.

The researcher adopted a conversational approach during the interview, allowing participants to express themselves without a specific language requirement. After the interview, the researcher treated, interpreted, and analyzed the collected data to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations for the study.

Data Analysis

Upon gathering the data, the researcher engaged in the application of Thematic Analysis to the responses. Thematic Analysis, acknowledged as a versatile method for analyzing qualitative data, proves suitable for comprehending experiences, thoughts, or behaviors across a dataset. The researcher adhered to a six-step process, considered the most widely accepted framework for conducting thematic Analysis: becoming thoroughly familiar with the data, generating

initial codes, diligently searching for themes, critically reviewing themes, precisely defining and naming themes, and ultimately producing the report. (Caulfield, J. (2019).

The data underwent Analysis in three distinct phases, aligning with the organizational framework proposed by Creswell (2007, p.148): organization of data, reduction of data through coding, and representation of data on tables and discussion. As Creswell (2007, p.150) explained, these phases did not follow a linear progression, but created a spiral, interrelated manner. In the initial phase, analysis intentionally obscured the names of the respondents to ensure confidentiality. The researcher used creative names in the discussion to maintain respondent anonymity, representing the teacher as one of the novel's main characters.

In the second phase, the researcher carefully read the transcripts multiple times. Employing coding and constant comparison analysis, the researcher systematically segmented and condensed the data. The interpretation of codes relied on field notes and memos taken during data collection and Analysis, encompassing dimensions and properties. We then classified codes as themes based on interpretations by comparing them within and between incidents.

In the final phase, the researcher illustrated the codes and themes through tables and thoroughly described and discussed them, with particular attention to the contextual details. We deemed this emphasis on the study context crucial in case studies. (Creswell, 2007, p.151). Throughout these three phases of data analysis, the researcher actively used them to refine the tentative codes and themes extracted from the data.

Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured the study's trustworthiness by following the guidelines. They maintained credibility through actively engaging in the study context, employing triangulation, and utilizing peer debriefing. Initially, the researcher spent sufficient time in the study context to comprehend the setting and establish the best rapport with the participant. The researchers used peer debriefing to prevent potential bias from affecting the research problem. They facilitated the transferability of findings by providing in-depth descriptions of codes and themes within the study context. Finally, the researchers adopted a reflective attitude toward the study problem to ensure confirmability throughout the study procedure. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) as cited by (Stahl and King, 2020).

Results and Discussion

One of the central themes of this case study is the advantages of the teacher in a female-dominated department in which the two sub-themes generated were conducive working place and adapting strategies from female teachers. Another central theme is the disadvantages of a male teacher in a female-dominated department with two sub-themes: doing all the heavy work and having limited power on personal issues. Another central theme is coping strategies that a male teacher uses in addressing challenges. Two sub-themes were generated, namely, communicating with peers on the proper distribution of work and seeking the help of a female colleague.

Advantages of the male teacher in a female-dominated department

Conducive working place

One of the sub-themes generated from the advantages of a male teacher is to have a conducive environment. The participant stated: *"I am aware and conscious of my surroundings. I see to it that I am always organized regarding my materials, for example, my desk and my things in the faculty room and classroom. I make sure that my things are tidy."*

This aligns with Article III – the Teacher and Community, Section 1. A teacher, responsible for facilitating learning and the development of youth, should provide the best service by creating an environment conducive to learning and growth.

Moreover, these findings align with the research conducted by Martin et al. (2018), as cited by Ahmed et al. (2018), which identified a notable disparity in classroom management approaches between male and female teachers. Female teachers tend to employ more intrusive approaches compared to their male counterparts. Literature presents varied outcomes from studies that compare the classroom management skills and competencies of teachers based on gender. Some studies suggest that teachers' gender influences their perceptions and opinions regarding classroom management skills and competencies.

This is consistent with Masoom's (2021) assertion that fostering a positive relationship involves cultivating a healthy working environment. Teachers consider their working environment pivotal, influencing their job satisfaction and tenure in the school. Teachers demonstrate higher satisfaction levels and a greater inclination to stay in schools characterized by a positive work environment, regardless of the demographic characteristics of the student body. Key elements of the work environment that significantly impact teachers include well-kept facilities, availability of modern instructional technology, and attention to physical conditions like safety and comfort, as well as consideration of economic factors.

Adapting female strategies to promote quality education

For the second sub-theme, Harry Potter said: *"I also adapted teaching strategies from the female teachers in terms of putting effort in making teaching materials to practice quality teaching. I now use more suitable and artistic instructional materials using the strategies of female teachers as a benchmark"*. This aligns with Section 2 of Article IV, "The Teacher and Profession," from the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers. It mandates that every teacher must maintain the highest standards of quality education, make thorough preparations for their teaching career, and consistently perform at their best in the practice of their profession.

This is consistent with the findings of Gunasekaran (2022) study, which contends that benchmarking can overcome resistance to change, establish a framework for external evaluation, and foster new communication networks among schools to share valuable information and experiences in teaching and research. The twenty-first-century education industry embraces a fresh perspective of "education for all," influenced by advancements in e-learning and distance education. Multimedia technologies play a crucial role in facilitating electronic and distance learning as effective mediums of education and training. Educational institutions actively employ diverse strategies to enhance the effectiveness and quality of learning. The adoption of benchmarking strategies, methods, and technologies in education can identify best practices in research and teaching.

Disadvantages of a male teacher in a female-dominated department

Doing all the heavy work

One of the sub-themes generated from the disadvantages of a female-dominated faculty when Harry Potter said: *"I always do the heavy works like lifting boxes of modules of lifting water jugs for the department. I am always assigned to fix problems in the faculty room."*

This study agrees with Garza, E. (2022), where the study highlights the perception that men, assumed to embody masculinity in the workplace, tend to undertake heavy tasks, while there exists a belief that female workers may not have the same capacity for lifting weight as their male counterparts. However, this perspective contradicts the American Bar Association's (2018) stance in a workplace law paper, emphasizing that a company engaging in the discriminatory practice of hiring only young, solid men for a heavy-lifting job would be violating the law. While it is legally acceptable to stipulate that a job mandates employees to lift a specific weight regularly, it is illegitimate to presume that only men would possess the capability to do so.

Moreover, leaders have the authority to participate in decision-making. Distributing tasks appropriately, as a leadership practice in both formal and informal leadership positions, grants more autonomy through decision-making. When connected to innovation in teaching practices, decision-making enables leaders to make decisions irrespective of their status. This empowerment promotes heightened collaboration and job satisfaction. Intriguingly, the core strengths of distributed leadership, including shared decision-making, empowerment, collective capacity building, and collaboration, all constitute elements linked to improving innovations in schools (Ni et al., 2018).

Limited power on related issues among female students

The second generated sub-theme under the disadvantages is limited power on related issues among female students. In this sub-theme, Harry Potter stated: *"As an adviser, some of my female students approach other teachers when they have problems rather than telling it to me. Their reason is that they think they are more comfortable saying their "girl problems to a female teacher."*

In Article VIII - The Teachers and the Learners, Section 2, it is emphasized that teachers must acknowledge the paramount importance of the interest and welfare of learners. Teachers are expected to handle each learner justly and impartially. However, according to Cris (2023), the research asserts that mistrust prevails among male teachers, with many educators fearing insinuations that they have entered the teaching profession for questionable reasons and that they pose a threat to children.) The research states that mistrust is prevalent among male teachers, with many educators fearing insinuations that they have entered the teaching profession for questionable reasons and that they pose a threat to children. In our contemporary society, males and females share a passion for teaching. However, prevailing societal norms make it challenging for males to pursue this profession due to the fear of potential misunderstandings that could jeopardize their lives. In an all-girls school, a male teacher is not allowed to be alone in the classroom with a student; another person must be present as a precautionary measure. This situation contributes to the perception that male teachers are inherently untrustworthy.

Coping Strategies

Communicate with peers on the proper distribution of works

The first sub-theme is communicating with peers on the proper distribution of work; the participant stated: *"There should be proper distribution of work because there are works that even a female teacher can do."* According to Whitten E. et al. (2019), in the overall success of a co-teaching team, effective collaboration and communication play crucial roles. Co-teachers benefit from planned collaboration, which provides equal opportunities for sharing ideas,

fostering mutual understanding and respect, and making well-informed decisions focused on classroom success. Consistent communication unifies team members, enhancing their readiness to tackle daily obstacles and challenges in the classroom. It is essential not to leave your "talk time" to chance.

This aligns with Article 3, Section 7 of the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, where it states that every teacher must cultivate harmonious and pleasant personal and official relations with other professionals, government officials, and individuals or groups collectively. Moreover, in line with Article 5, Section 5 of the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, every teacher is entrusted with the responsibility to address unprofessional and unethical conduct by any associate, though it's essential to tread with caution, intervening only when backed by irrefutable evidence.

Seek the help of a female colleague

The second sub-theme generated from the study is to seek the help of a female colleague. Harry Potter states: *"Aside from that, to have some advice on handling female students, I seek advice from female teachers."* This agrees with Clasful (2023), where the researcher emphasized the importance of male teachers seeking support from their colleagues. Engaging in conversations and seeking advice from female teachers may pose challenges for male teachers, but such interactions are crucial for building connections. Valuable insights and guidance often stem from practical experiences, making mentorship from seasoned professionals particularly beneficial for new teachers. Male teachers encounter unique challenges in their profession, ranging from navigating the responsibilities of being a male role model and father figure to students, determining appropriate attire for the workplace, and addressing issues that may arise with female students tactfully. Working as a male teacher can be demanding and may only be suitable for some. However, individuals possessing the right personality, patience, and dedication can find it to be a fulfilling and enduring career. Prospective male teachers can comprehensively understand what lies ahead by taking a prudent approach and setting realistic expectations before entering the field.

The alignment is evident in the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers, specifically in Article V: The Teachers and the Profession, Section 1. According to this code, teachers must consistently embody the spirit of professional loyalty, confidence, and faith in one another. It mandates them to demonstrate self-sacrifice for the common good and engage in full cooperation with colleagues. In any controversy where the best interest of the learners, the school, or the profession is at stake, teachers are obliged to actively support one another.

Conclusion and Implications

This case study illuminates the experiences of the sole male teacher within the English Department. The findings led to several conclusions: firstly, the study revealed that adapting strategies from female teachers and having a conducive working place are advantageous aspects of being the sole male teacher. On the contrary, the disadvantages include handling all the heavy tasks and having limited influence on personal issues concerning female students. Additionally, the coping strategies identified involve communication with peers for the distribution of tasks and seeking the assistance of a female teacher to address these challenges. Considering these significant findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends that should school conduct seminars on gender-related topics.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limiting itself to a single school, the study implies that it could form the basis for future research with a broader scope. Moreover, upcoming researchers might consider exploring alternatives to the case study method, choosing a phenomenological approach to attain a more profound comprehension of the subject matter.

Contribution of authors

This paper has a single author and confirms that the author reviewed this study.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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