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A phenomenographic inquiry on the concept of competence among Filipino teachers

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Abstract

Conceptual understanding about the phenomenon of competence in teaching was explored among 20 pre-service and 20 beginning teachers in the City of Manila, Philippines using the phenomenographic approach of investigation. One-on-one interview sessions with the respondents were conducted using two sets of semi-structured interview guides. Thematic analysis served as the springboard for the identification of categories and underlying themes, which facilitated the construction of respective outcome space for the two groups under study. Comparative analysis of the pre-service and the beginning teachers' conceptions showed similarities as well as differences. The study revealed that the pre-service teachers 'saw' and 'understood' competence in the teaching profession in four different ways: 1) to possess desirable characteristics of a teacher; 2) to possess professional readiness to teach; 3) to manifest positive relationship with others; and 4) to respond to environmental and social changes. On the other hand, the beginning teachers' conceptions fell into four categories: 1) to influence the learning environment; 3) to manifest positive relationship with others; 3) to respond to the challenges of the profession; and 4) to perform multiple roles. Implications for the implementation of the Philippines' National Teacher Competency-Based Standards (NCBTS) as well as to teacher education institutions' curricular programs and admission policies were further established in the study.

Keywords: conceptual understanding; teacher competence; competency-based teacher standards; phenomenography

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1. Introduction

There is indeed a growing consensus among researchers and educators that the single most important factor that ascertains student performance is the quality of the teacher. Teaching competence has been attributed to the ability to do a particular work to a prescribed standard (Bourgonje & Tromp, 2011). Globally, nations' respective ministries of education formulated standards on what to expect from a classroom teacher. Such effort is a complex process of developing a nationally recognized set of competency-based standards. This set of competency-based standards is a policy direction to make a dependable judgment on teacher competency (Malaysian Teacher Standards, 2009). Serafini (2002) argued that measuring competency relegates teachers as mere performers rather than as reflective practitioners. Hence, he asserts that it is a critical issue how the teachers' "voices" and feedback in the process of coming up with these standards were considered. Similarly, Sandberg (2000) suggested that in order to produce accurate understanding of human actions in an organization, it is crucial to investigate the internal logic of human activity, that is, an individual's way of making sense of his/her work situation. Larsson (2010) subscribes to the need to capture what the classroom teachers themselves perceive as competence in their performance of their duties. These points raised in the existing literature were considered in the Philippine setting through this research.

Simultaneous with the implementation of the Philippine's National Competency-Based Teacher Standards, this research aimed to give more concrete evidences on what being a competent teacher truly means by going into the grass root level - to uncover how the Filipino teachers, both the pre-service and the beginning teachers, truly understand and give meaning to this big word in education - *competence.* Based on the conceptions manifested by the pre-service and the beginning teachers, the study was able to establish crucial implications to policies related to the competency-based teachers' standards as well as to policies of teacher education institutions in the country.

2. Review of Related Literature

Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) identified four major inclinations of a competent teacher which are connected to the teacher's skills in dealing with the students: (1) he/she encourages students to reflect on social reality and empowers them to transform the existing conditions that shape their lives; (2) he/she promotes the natural manner of transfer of knowledge and essential basic skills from one generation to another; (3) he/she gives appropriate assessment tools and methods suited for the attainment of instructional objectives; and (4) he/she demonstrates skills in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of both externally-produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.

In a study done in India, Bhargava, and Pathy (2011) explored the student teachers' perception of the essential competencies they want to see in a teacher. The majority of the respondents ranked knowledge of the subject matter, communication skills, maintaining punctuality and discipline as foremost teaching competencies. Cubucku (2010) reported that most of the 90 pre-service teachers involved in her study think of competence in teaching as balancing in showing authority and creating a caring environment in the class. "They believe that they should care about their students, understand them and maintain this perspective, and meet the instructional requirements" (Cubucku, 2010). In Sweden, Larsson (2010) found out that the teachers' discernments of competence fall into four categories: (1) pedagogical knowledge; (2) pedagogical intentions; (3) pedagogical considerations; and (4) pedagogical assets.

Koksal (2014) briefly discussed how the competency-based standards evolved over time. The concept of teacher competencies emerged for the first time in the 1890s and became a topic of publication in the 1960s and

1970s. In the 1990s, many professional standards were developed for teachers like the case of England in 1997, which was revised in 2007 and resulted in three main aspects of teacher competencies such as professional characteristics, professional knowledge, and professional skills. In 1998, the Ministry of Education in Belgium collaborated with teacher training institutes to identify a professional profile and basic competencies. In Belgian context, basic competencies are the minimum competencies the pre-service teachers should possess after graduation while professional profiles are the "aims" that will enable the practicing teachers pursue professional development opportunities (Koksal, 2014).

At the turn of the century in 2000, Turkey made significant headway towards professional standards for teachers. There are six general competency areas: personal and professional values; professional development; knowing the student, the process of learning and teaching; monitoring and evaluating learning and development; school, family, and society relationships; and curriculum and content knowledge (Koksal, 2014). Certainly, the development of teaching standards has been a growing feature of the global education agenda since the inception of the Dakar Framework during the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal from April 26 to 28, 2000 to provide quality education that will give the learners the opportunities for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century.

In the United States of America (USA), starting 2001 the national professional standards are considered as universal standards and implemented in diverse sub-cultures regardless of local knowledge and social problems (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004). Competencies and competency-based approaches dominated state guidelines for licensure and offerings in teacher preparation across the nation (Blanton et al., 2003). For instance, in Washington State, the Council of Chief of State School Officers (2011) offered a set of model core teaching standards which outlined what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure every K-12 student reaches the goal of being ready to enter college or the workforce in the USA.

In the Southeast Asia, eleven member countries of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organizations gathered to explore commonalities in teaching competency standards across the region that will support an active stand on capacity building, teacher exchange, and lifelong learning. The gathered data showed the common domains of teaching competency standards across the eleven countries. These are professional knowledge, professional skills, personal characteristics, professional/personal ethical standards and values, professional development, and lifelong learning (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2010).

In the Philippines, competencies in the teaching profession are prescribed by the Department of Education's document called National Competency-based Teacher Standards (NCBTS) developed in 2006 and implemented in 2009. This very important document in the basic education sector provides the framework that defines effective teaching in all aspects of a teacher's professional life and in all phases of teacher development (Department of Education, 2006). Moreover, said document emphasized that "competency-based" means that the standards for characterizing good teaching are defined in terms of what the teacher is competent to do, so the NCBTS is concerned with whether teachers are competent in helping students learn (Department of Education, 2006).

3. Methodology

The study adopted a phenomenographic line of inquiry since it sought to describe the qualitatively different understanding of a particular phenomenon and to discover variations in the experience or way of understanding some aspects of the world (Bruce et al., 2004). As a phenomenographic research, in-depth one-on-one interview was used as the data collection method. Two sets of semi-structured interview guide were developed and validated by the researchers. Each interview guide consisted of both 'warm up' and main questions to guide the proceedings. The 'warm up' questions facilitated the rapport building between the interviewer and the interviewee. The main questions were developed in such a way that they would elicit the differing and complementary perspectives of the respondents about the phenomenon under study. The questions allowed a

leeway to probe and follow up responses for elaboration and clarification. The pre-service teachers were asked questions on: what it means to be competent or incompetent, what qualities make a teacher competent, and what things the university does to prepare them to become competent classroom teachers after graduation. The in-service or beginning teachers, on the other hand, were asked questions that dealt with: what it means to be competent or incompetent, how they know they are competent classroom teachers, and how their superiors know they are competent.

The first group of respondents was composed of 20 graduating students (13 females and 7 males) of the Philippine Normal University, the National Center for Teacher Education in the Philippines. They were chosen upon nomination by their respective class presidents. The graduating students were believed to have acquired the basic competencies of "would-be" teachers. The second group of study respondents comprised 10 elementary school teachers and 10 high school teachers from two nominated public schools by the Division of City Schools in Manila, Philippines. Of the 20 public school teachers, 18 were female while the remaining two were male. Purposive sampling was done to select the 20 classroom teachers. The basic criterion to qualify as a respondent is the length of service, which should be five years at most. The first five years of teaching is believed to be a crucial stage in the teaching profession during which the teachers are expected to exhibit the teaching competencies they acquired during college. Other countries called the teachers at this stage as "beginning teachers."

The following steps in data analysis as adapted from the study of Entwistle and Marton (1994) were undertaken:

- ➢ Transcribing of all interviews in verbatim format;
- ➢ Analysis of the transcripts of interviews done by three independent judges who are teacher educators in behavioral sciences;
- ➢ Coding of statements in the transcripts considered significant to the research problem by three independent judges;
- ➢ Consolidation of significant statements per transcript, which became the unit of analysis;
- ➢ Grouping of significant statements into categories across the transcripts based on similarities and differences through the use of Qualyzer Qualitative Data Analysis Software, a content analysis program that categorizes responses with regard frequency and salience;
- ➢ Identification of emerging themes that became the recognized conceptions;
- ➢ Selection of specific responses (in "quotations") that best represent the discerned conceptions in each theme including translation in English if thoughts were expressed in Filipino language; and
- ➢ Provision of identification number for each quoted idea to include gender and transcript number, for example (Female, PS11; IS09), "PS" denotes "pre-service teacher" while "IS" denotes "in-service or beginning teacher".

The outcomes of the inquiry, therefore, were categories and themes which captured the critical dimensions on how the two groups of Filipino teachers, the pre-service and in-service or beginning teachers, expressed their conceptual understanding of competence in the teaching profession. An outcome space for each of the groups of respondents described the relationships between categories.

4. Results and Discussion

This section of the study is presented in two phases. The first phase focuses on the concept of competence among pre-service teachers while they are in their last year of teacher training while the second phase centers on the how the beginning teachers conceive and understand how it is to be a competent teacher in relation to their roles as classroom teachers. As a phenomenographic study, a separate outcome space for the pre-service and beginning teachers' conceptions were crystallized and presented towards the end of each of the first and second phases.

4.1 The pre-service teachers' conception of competence

The findings are presented in categories with corresponding themes, which embody the differing ways the

pre-service teachers understood the concept of competence in the teaching profession.

Category 1: To possess desirable characteristics of a teacher - The first theme under category 1 is related to a teacher's cognitive abilities. Almost all of the pre-service teachers involved in the study conceived competence of a teacher as having above par ability to master the subject matter; to exercise critical thinking in classroom discussions; and to exhibit good communication skills.

> *"I believe that as a teacher, you cannot give what you do not have. So, to be a competent teacher is to strive hard to master the subject matter and have very good oral communication skills so that the students will truly learn from her."*[Female, PS02]

> *"One who critically assesses, weighs things before he/she delivers the lesson so that the students would most benefit from what he/she is teaching. In a class discussion, it is very important that the teacher will be able to bring out debates and discourses among the students up to the point that the best explanation of a concept or the best answer to the question will emerge."* [Female, PS05]

Possibly, the pre-service teachers look up to their own mentors from elementary to college days who possessed these cognitive abilities. Female, PS10 expounded that she was inspired to become a teacher because of these qualities she emulated from her former elementary teacher, someone she described as a competent teacher *"because of her wisdom, communication skills, and critical-mindedness."*

Furthermore, the pre-service teachers considered their training in the university as a big factor that would contribute to becoming a competent teacher after graduation. Female, PS12 said, *"In one of our Professional Education subjects, we were taught the art of questioning wherein we needed to consider the Bloom's Taxonomy on how we craft our questions for our future students."* Male, PS16 furthermore shared that *"we are indeed lucky to have very good professors in the Professional Education subjects in the university who practically are our models in our future way of handing our classes."*

The second theme, on the other hand, focuses on competence that relates to the possession of desirable personality traits of the classroom teacher. The pre-service teachers talked about the importance of teacher characteristics, such as being responsible, being a role model, and being able to exude proper demeanor of a teacher.

> *"A competent teacher should be responsible, dedicated, and one who thinks about the welfare of her students. She comes to school on time and prepares her lessons early so that she is always ready to teach her lessons."*[Female, PS08]

> *"The way a teacher projects while teaching, like her poise, her modulated voice, her eye contact with the students, also indicates competence, in my opinion."* [Male, PS20]

> *"One who can inspire his students and become a role model. This way, his teaching has a positive impact on the students because what he teaches will remain in them for a very long time; also, becoming a model which the students can emulate, like his values and integrity as a teacher."*[Male, PS13]

> *"When you are talking about competence, there should be willingness to give your heart. There is passion. It is very difficult to teach when your heart is focused on something else."* [Male, PS20]

Category 2: To possess professional readiness to teach - The second category focuses on the competency of a teacher relevant to professional readiness to teach. The pre-service teachers mentioned instances that have bearings on what the teachers can bring into the teaching-learning environment rooted in their training from

school and self-initiated preparations. The first theme generated under category 2 is the concept of a competent teacher who has acquired the appropriate pedagogical knowledge and skills.

> *"For me, a teacher is competent when he thinks of innovation in the delivery of his lessons."* [Female, PS01]

> *"Creativity in teaching is very important for me especially that I am specializing in elementary education. I have to be very creative in my teaching styles. Nonetheless, I am so grateful that our university is the best when it comes to teaching methodologies. In our professional education subjects, I can say, we have been given the chance to know and demonstrate various methods of teaching."* [Male, PS04]

> *"The "how" of teaching matters when it comes to being competent. Being intelligent is useless if the teacher does not know how to deliver the lessons. Also, the students will get bored when the teacher only knows one method, especially the lecture type."* [Female, PS15]

> *"It is also important to know the application of a method appropriate to a given subject matter and then using a simpler language that can best be understood by the pupils."* [Male, PS18]

The second theme under category 2 deals on how the teacher manages the classroom environment. The pre-service teachers talked about the aspect of disciplining the students as well as creating a harmonious teaching-learning ambiance as the lessons are being delivered. One respondent even mentioned that "*the teacher should exhibit authority inside the classroom*" [Male, PS11]. Another respondent stressed that "*a competent teacher is conscious on how to manage time in executing his lessons.*" [Female, PS15]

> *"I appreciate our off-campus course wherein we experienced how to manage an actual class and from there, we were taught on how to adapt and adjust so that we can teach and, at the same time, manage student behavior properly."* [Male, PS11]

Category 3: To manifest positive relationship with others - The teacher's harmonious interaction with the students, co-teachers, and administrators was likewise conceived by the pre-services teachers as a prelude to competence in teaching (category 3). One notable response under category 3 was about "*Consideration of the opinions, needs, and feelings of others is also very important when you think of competence.*" [Female, PS19]

The first theme generated under category 3 is focused on concern for the students. *"A competent classroom teacher is someone who enjoys being with his students and shows empathy to students.*" [Female, PS12]

> *"It also means being approachable, always ready to listen, yet knows his boundaries when it comes to dealing with the students."* [Male, PS03]

> *"Respecting the diversity of learners and being open-minded also contribute to being competent…."* [Female, PS15]

The second theme under category 3 has something to do with the teacher's positive relationship with other stakeholders. One pre-service teacher explained competence in terms of exhibiting concern not only for students but also for parents, co-teachers, and administrators [Female, PS09]. Another notable response is on the "*willingness to share knowledge and extend help to co-workers could also mean competence among teachers.*" [Female, PS10]

Category 4: To respond to the demands of the environment - Dynamism, as an element of competence, represents the last category identified by the group of pre-service teachers. Being adaptable to changes is the first theme generated under category 4.

> *"A competent teacher is flexible or adaptable to changes."* [Male, PS06]

"Responsive to change like what is happening…the K-12 curriculum." [Female, PS09]

"Willingness to change and be prepared for changes in the system…." [Male, PS03]

"It is not only a matter of having mastery or knowledge to teach but also being sensitive of your environment. The application of knowledge to the environment calls for flexibility." [Female, PS01]

Responding to the needs of the society is the second theme under category 4. The pre-service teachers talked about the ability of teachers to "walk an extra mile" to get involved in the activities of the community as well as in advocacy campaigns on being Filipinos. Idealistic as it may appear, one pre-service teacher emphasized: *"a competent teacher is always ready for the changes that occur in our society, like the K-12 curriculum which should be embraced with open arms for us to cope with the global community's basic education standards."* [Female, PS01]

"Being pragmatic in what happening in our society…considering what the society needs from the teachers for the benefits of the learners. The teachers need to level up, do away with traditional or conventional teaching." [Male, PS13]

"We are in the age of information technology, so the teacher should cope with this and be able to think of ways how the various technologies could help them be more effective in teaching." [Female, PS12]

The outcome space representing the pre-service teachers' concept of competence - The first phase of the study showed several vital findings related to the qualitatively different ways in which the pre-service teachers 'conceived' competence in the teaching profession. **Figure 1** diagrammatically exhibits the outcome space summarizing the themes under each conceptual category.
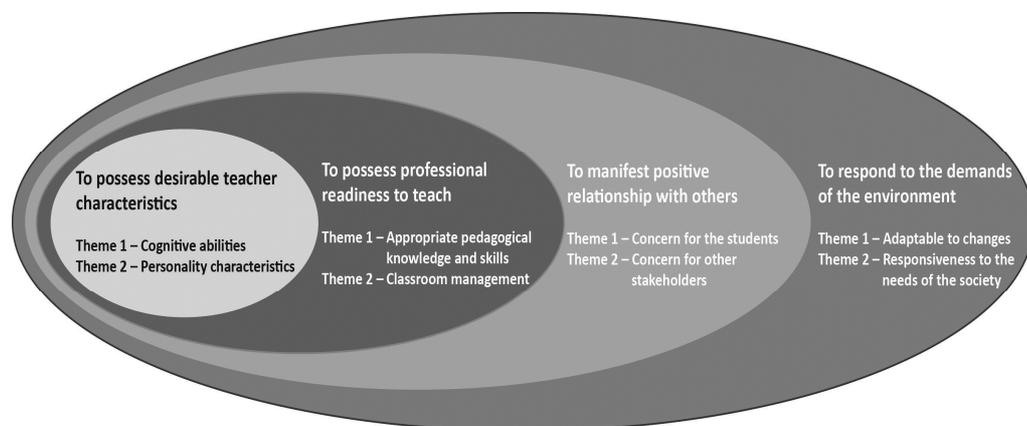

Figure 1. Diagrammatical representation of the outcome space (Pre-service Teachers)

To possess desirable characteristics of a teacher in terms of cognitive abilities and certain personality traits is placed in the innermost circle of the diagram, representing the teachers' two characteristics which are the 'core' for any graduate of a teacher education degree.

Possession of above average cognitive abilities is a common conception among the pre-service teachers, and this supports how Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) defined a competent teacher as having the cognitive abilities needed to effectively impart knowledge to students, which can be manifested by the teacher's mastery of the subject matter. It is worthy to note, however, that the current study suggested other cognitive dimensions that should be exhibited by a competent teacher like above par critical thinking skills and good communication skills. Being responsible and a role model were basically viewed by the pre-service teachers as qualities of being competent.

The second circle includes the conceptions of the pre-service teachers focused on the readiness to teach in

terms of pedagogical knowledge and skills, and classroom management. Classroom control appears to be an issue among the graduating education students as they have experienced practice teaching under one of their university courses. As Male, PS11 shared, *"the grand demonstration activity taught us to manage the classroom properly, which includes smooth delivery of the lessons and discipline of students."* In this instance, the pre-service teachers are somehow unsure of the delineation between classroom management and student discipline and tends to use them side by side. Levin & Nolan (2000) clarified that classroom management relates to events that occurred in a classroom, such as maintaining order and cooperation, to prevent problems from arising while disciplinary problems occurred in the act of handling and managing students' behavioral problems (Levin & Nolan, 2000). Hence, there is an apparent need to inculcate among pre-service education students what constitute classroom management so that they would be more prepared for their actual teaching job.

The other theme that shares the same inner circle of classroom management is acquiring the necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills. Being students of the premier teaching institution in the Philippines, the pre-service teachers mentioned with pride their experiences of having applied the pedagogical knowledge and skills during their off-campus training. The importance of pedagogical knowledge was emphasized in the study of Larsson (2010). "Pedagogical knowledge consists of the theoretical bases from which the teacher work and which also has an impact upon the way teachers view their students" (Larsson, 2010). Among the pre-service teachers involved in the study, it is obvious that they felt the need to be equipped with such theoretical bases that will eventually mold them to become competent teachers.

As the outcome space extends further outward, the pre-service teachers in the study already have an awareness of the need for teachers to manifest a positive relationship with others. Understanding the students' common and unique situations and extending assistance or willingness to share their time, knowledge, and skills to co-workers are the two underlying themes, which represent their conception of competence. Specific to the need to show genuine concern for students, Goh, Saad, and Wong (2012) found out that Malaysian teachers also viewed competence in teaching by knowing what to do with problematic students, showing patience and interest to each student's achievement in school.

The outermost circle of the outcome space depicts the final conception categorized as the teachers' capacity to respond to environmental and social changes. Being adaptable to the changing demands of teaching as well as showing a sense of national and community involvement were the two underlying themes which appear to be unique as conception of competence among Filipino pre-service teachers. With the mandate to implement the K to12 curriculum in the basic education system in the Philippines, the pre-service teachers saw the need to adapt to the change and be positive about it; thus, reflecting a deep sense of nationalism. The need for a quantum leap to cope with the thrusts of ASEAN 2015 can be discerned from the conceptions of the pre-service teachers.

4.2 The beginning teachers' conception of competence

Four categories emanated from the content analysis relative to the beginning teachers' conception of competence in teaching, as presented in this section.

Category 1: To influence the learning environment - The first category of conceptions of competence among the beginning teachers involved in the study centered on the teacher's ability to influence the learning environment as characterized by the two underlying themes: the teacher's creativity in the delivery of lessons and being reflective of teaching methods used.

> *"Being competent means you can see the students' progress through using the most appropriate teaching methods in any subject area assigned to you."* [Female, IS10]

> *"…always prepare for your lesson which can be manifested in your mastery of the knowledge and skills you need to transfer to your pupils. Also being resourceful…meaning, teaching not only what is in the book…being 'out of the box.'"* [Female, 1S02]

"Mastery can be seen when the teacher is able to answer all the questions of the students and not elude or avoid being questioned. Further, there should be depth in his/her answer." [Male, 1S14]

"Of course, he possesses the teaching skills. He can deliver the lesson in meaningful and logical sequence, with meaningful learning experiences like relating the lesson with the past lessons and to real situations." [Female, IS09]

"In school, I think I am competent when I am able to achieve the learning objectives. I make it a point to find ways on how I could teach the students in a way that they will understand the topics….then later, I will use the most appropriate evaluation method." [Female, IS15]

Category 2: To manifest positive relationships with others - A competent classroom teacher is expected to exhibit a positive relationship with the students and other stakeholders. The first theme under category 2 is focused on the teacher's concern for the students. Such concern could be shown by being fair and just, showing positive discipline, and also 'walking an extra mile' to show that each student is important.

"There are students that you need to visit when they have been absent for a long time. You need to know what happened to them, why they were absent. There were instances that they failed to go to school because they experienced bullying." [Female, IS16]

"…do not pass judgment immediately, try to look at all sides of the problem of the students." [Female, IS15]

"A competent teacher has the time and effort to know each of his students…their strengths and weaknesses." [Female, IS03]

"The teacher should set up an orderly classroom; implement positivity even in disciplining the students… show authority but not to create fear among the pupils." [Female, IS 06]

The second theme, on the other hand, is on the teacher's responsibility to show concern for parents, co-teachers, and the administrators as well. *"Teamwork is indeed a crucial element in an organization; hence, one should have a good relationship with the people around him/her"* as expressed by one respondent [Male, IS14]. Other statements which mirror this theme:

"You should know how to establish good relationship with co-teachers. You are willing to mentor others, and you will not let new teachers feel inferior because you are more knowledgeable." [Female, IS08]

"There is also a need to consider our relationship with others, like the older teachers, the parents, and the administrators. There is lesser stress, and you are more competent when there is harmony in your relationships in school." [Female, IS05]

Category 3: To respond to the challenges of the teaching profession - The third category of conceptions among the beginning teachers interviewed in the study is centered on their ability to respond to the challenges of the teaching profession. After their four years of training in the university, it appears that they responded to the gargantuan challenges of teaching with self-efficacy. For them, it is very important to have dedication to their work as manifested through being punctual, preparing ahead of time for each lesson, extending working hours to check papers, and adjusting to teach two class shifts in one school day.

"There are so many challenges now. It's hard to teach seven subjects in one day, and you have to start as early as 6:30 in the morning…. It's too tiring, but a competent teacher must cope with such situation, I think." [Female, IS19]

"For me, a competent teacher is always punctual in attendance. In my observation, this is a usual problem in the public school…when the teacher is late or absent." [Female, IS10]

"I think it is very important that the teacher is dedicated to her craft which can be shown in her way of molding the pupils, guiding them closely on the lessons, and at the same time guiding them to become better persons." [Male, IS11]

Aside from being a dedicated teacher, responding to the challenges of the teaching profession also calls for being "up-to-date" so as to deliver the lessons competently. Responsibility to read ahead of the students, to research, and to attend training and seminars to be updated with the current trends and foci in teaching embodied the second theme under category 3. *"The teacher needs to read a lot,"* according to one respondent [Female, IS17]. *"Attendance at training program, seminars, and meetings should not be missed by a competent teacher!"* was further mentioned by another beginning teacher in the study [Male, IS20].

Category 4: To perform multiple roles - The fourth category refers to the teacher's undertaking of multiple roles inside the classroom. The beginning teachers interviewed in the study expressed that a competent teacher is able to do multiple roles, not just being a teacher but the second parent and being a trainer or coach as well. This conception is more common among the elementary school teachers involved in the study.

The first theme under category 4 is the 'teacher being the second parent'. One respondent [Female, IS10] said that *"in public schools, there are a lot of students who come to school without money to buy food, and I think part of being a competent teacher is to show concern for these students, like giving them something to eat, once in a while."* Another respondent said [Female, IS18], *"like their parents, the teacher should prepare the students for their life…. see to it the pupils are ready to learn, to listen, and to interact in class."* Other actual responses which represent this theme:

"You get to do it all…be a mother, be a teacher….sometimes a religious authority also, so you can discipline them properly." [Female, IS07]

"….it seems like you are the second mother of the students because you need to discipline them the way a mother should do… so that they will know when to listen and follow your instructions…." [Female, IS17]

Being a coach or a trainer is also expected of competent teachers as they are given opportunities to closely mentor potential students for external competitions. According to one beginning teacher (Female, IS04), *"I have been assigned to coach students for competitions in the District of Manila, and I got good feedback from my school head… then I felt competent."* Two notable answers which support this theme are quoted as follows:

"A competent teacher, for me, is somehow able to balance everything, as a teacher inside the classroom, as a co-teacher, a counselor, a friend." [Female, IS19]

"Aside from the classroom duties, serving as a resource speaker in seminars also is suggestive of being a competent teacher because your school head is confident about your ability to do other things." [Female, IS10]

The outcome space representing the beginning teachers' concept of competence - The second phase of the study showed how qualitatively different the conceptions of the beginning teachers are on the phenomenon of "competence" in teaching. **Figure 2** diagrammatically exhibits the outcome space summarizing the themes under each conceptual category.

The core conceptual understanding among the beginning teachers is centered on the teacher's capacity to influence the learning environment, as presented in the innermost circle of the outcome space (Figure 2). For them, it is a must to master the subject matter for learning to occur to the fullest, coupled with the ability to

reflect on how the lessons should be effectively delivered in the classroom. In Malaysia, the beginning teachers likewise regard 'mastery of the subject matter' as one of the core conceptions of a competent teacher (Goh, Saad, & Wong, 2012). Such consensus among the beginning teacher-respondents from the two countries reflects the need to strengthen would-be teachers' content knowledge, which their teacher preparation curricula should have equipped them before they finally join the teaching profession.
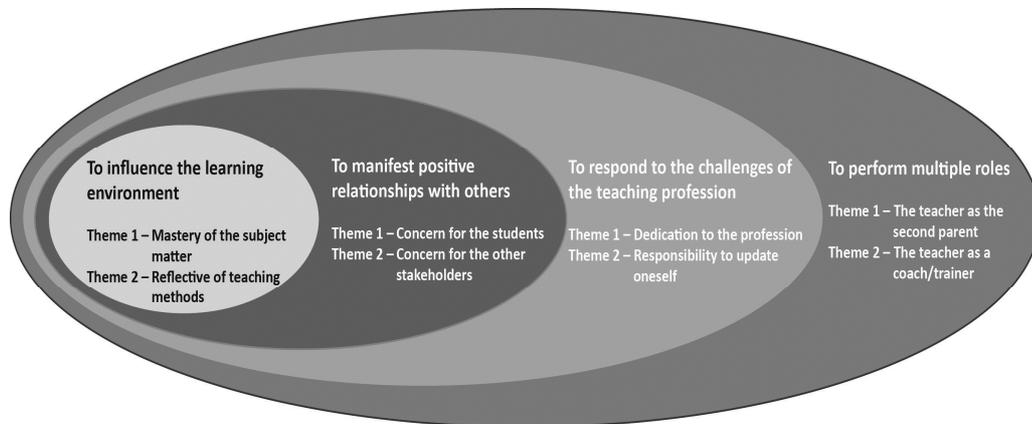

To influence the learning environment

Theme 1 – Mastery of the subject matter
Theme 2 – Reflective of teaching methods

To manifest positive relationships with others

Theme 1 – Concern for the students
Theme 2 – Concern for the other stakeholders

To respond to the challenges of the teaching profession

Theme 1 – Dedication to the profession
Theme 2 – Responsibility to update oneself

To perform multiple roles

Theme 1 – The teacher as the second parent
Theme 2 – The teacher as a coach/trainer

Figure 2. Diagrammatical representation of the outcome space (Beginning Teachers)

The second circle presents the beginning teachers' conceptions that competence in teaching necessitates manifesting harmonious working relationship with the students and other stakeholders of the school. Early in their professional lives, the respondents realized the importance of showing concern for the welfare of the students, especially those who need more attention, and of exercising positive discipline inside the classroom. They were also aware that the traditional discipline of verbal reprimands are now outdated, and the psychological underpinning of positive reinforcement should come into force. Likewise, the concern to establish good teamwork with co-teachers, parents, and administrators is equally important in showing competence in teaching. As Larson (2010) pointed out, competence also calls for teachers not to limit themselves to the business inside the four walls of the classroom but also to collaborate with others, with the wider society of the educational community.

The third circle proposes that a competent teacher should respond to the challenges of the profession by being dedicated and being responsible to update oneself. Dedication, as understood by the beginning teachers, calls for punctuality, ready lesson plans, extended working hours, and coping with two shifts of classes in one school day. It is worthy to note this unique situation of the study respondents who were public school teachers in the City of Manila. The usual class sizes range from 45-70 and due to the shortage of classroom, shifting of classes becomes inevitable. For these Filipino teachers, they apparently saw the need for dedication to their chosen profession. Responsibility to grow professionally by updating oneself on what are current and up-to-date, both in content and teaching methods, is seen by the beginning teachers as an evidence of competency so as to respond to the challenges of their profession. The Filipino beginning teachers are seemingly concerned about what they can offer to the students and how they can address the demands of the 21st century learners.

The final category of conception, as depicted in the outermost circle of Figure 2, is the unique Filipino conception of competence in teaching. Embedded in the Filipino cultural value of "*kapwa*" (togetherness) surfaced the concept of a competent teacher who manages to perform multiple roles. The teacher becoming the second parent inside the classroom, even calling their students "*anak*" (offspring) and spending own money to provide to some needy students, are seen as manifestation of competence in teaching which cannot be discerned in the writings of other researches outside of the Philippines. Furthermore, the teacher as a coach and trainer displays the Filipino's unique concern for students' welfare to excel in competitions in the wider educational community, like the districts and divisions of City Schools. Juggling with the multiples roles calls for discipline and a deep sense of commitment to the chosen profession, and this particular result is indeed one of the major

contributions of the study. As Larsson (2010) mentioned, "*Being a teacher is like having a tray full of marbles and trying to have all those marbles moving at the same time, without dropping any of them, which could be interpreted as a mission impossible*" (Larsson, 2010).

5. Conclusions and Implications

The pre-service teachers 'saw' and 'understood' competence in the teaching profession in four different ways: 1) to possess desirable characteristics of a teacher; 2) to possess professional readiness to teach; 3) to manifest positive relationship with others; and 4) to respond to environmental and social changes. On the other hand, the beginning teachers' conceptions differed in four categories: 1) to influence the learning environment; 3) to manifest positive relationship with others; 3) to respond to the challenges of the profession; and 4) to perform multiple roles.

The two sets of outcome space depicted all possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question for the two populations represented by the two sample groups. Primarily, the conceptual category of 'having to manifest a positive relationship with others' appeared in both sets of outcome space. This is indicative of how the Filipino teachers value interpersonal relationship and its influence on being competent in their profession. Apparently, the pre-service teachers were more concerned with what the new teachers could offer the schools upon landing on their first teaching job – the possession of desirable characteristics such as above par cognitive abilities and certain personality traits. On the other hand, the beginning teachers basically viewed competence in teaching as the teacher's ability to influence the learning environment by being equipped with the appropriate pedagogical knowledge and skills, and classroom management. Indeed, the beginning teachers' conceptions were operating on the realities of their daily classroom teaching activities.

The commonalities as well as peculiarities in the conceptual understanding of the two groups of respondents truly call for differentiated competency-based standards across the different stages of the teaching profession, which is not considered in the currently implemented NCBTS. However, there are categories of conceptions which are embedded in certain domains of the current NCBTS. Conceptions of competence in terms of the pedagogical knowledge and skills, which are common for the two groups of respondents, are part of the "curriculum" domain (domain 4) of the NCBTS. Likewise, the conceptions of competence among the pre-service teachers which focused on the teachers' ability to respond to the demands of environmental and social changes are considered under the domain "community linkages" (domain 6). The beginning teachers' conceptions of competence on how the teacher responds to the challenges of the teaching profession by updating oneself towards professional growth is considered part of the NCBTS' domain 7: personal growth and professional development.

There are three notable sets of conceptions of competence found in the study which can enhance or be integrated into the existing Philippine standards. The first one is related to the teacher's capacity to express positivity in dealing not only with students but also with other stakeholders of the school. The second is on the beginning teachers' conception of competence which necessitates them to perform multiple roles while dispensing their duties and responsibilities. As beginning teachers, they felt the need to portray multiple roles and by doing so, they could attain competence in their chosen profession. Both of these may be considered under domain 6: community linkages, and domain 7: personal growth and professional development. The last set of conceptions of competence is focused on the teacher's capability to respond to environmental and social changes. This particular set of conceptions may be considered under domain 1: social regard for learning, and domain 6: community linkages.

The findings of the study also have implications for teacher education programs in the Philippines. The administrators in the teacher education institutions (TEIs) may consider these conceptions in the crafting of new teacher education curricular programs in response to the mandatory K to12 educational system. Likewise, the conceptions of the graduating students (e.g., "*to possess the professional readiness to teach*") are vital inputs in

the way the TEIs prepare their graduates to enter the teaching profession and to pass the national licensure examination for teachers. Moreover, admission policies of the TEIs could include setting higher passing score in the entrance examination to ensure higher level of cognitive abilities among the would-be teachers.

Finally, the study demonstrates an initial attempt to utilize phenomenography in educational research in the Philippines. Its appropriateness to uncover how unique the Filipino teachers' conceptions of competence, and its research methodology are indeed a sound contribution of the study. As Bourgounje & Tromp (2011) pointed out, "*The formulation of competences for teachers should stem from a discussion of what is considered a good quality teacher, and the profile should be designed in cooperation with all stakeholders involved, most notably with the teachers.*"

5.1 Recommendations

The results of the study and the conclusions drawn from them reveal a common conception of competence, which could be attributed to the orientation that the pre-service and beginning teachers have for four years in a teacher education institution. Their language of competence is limited to the standards set in NCBTS. Considering that NCBTS has yet to capture the teacher quality requirements of the K to 12 Educational Reform, an enhancement of the standards is needed. These standards should be validated by also involving the pre-service teachers and in-service teachers at the beginning to other higher career stages to capture their voices in its finalization. The information generated from the study could be an input to this said enhancement. With phenomenography as the sole approach to this investigation, limitations to the study's claims are inevitable; therefore, to strengthen the empirical results, it is recommended that other research approaches be employed in conjunction with phenomenography.

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