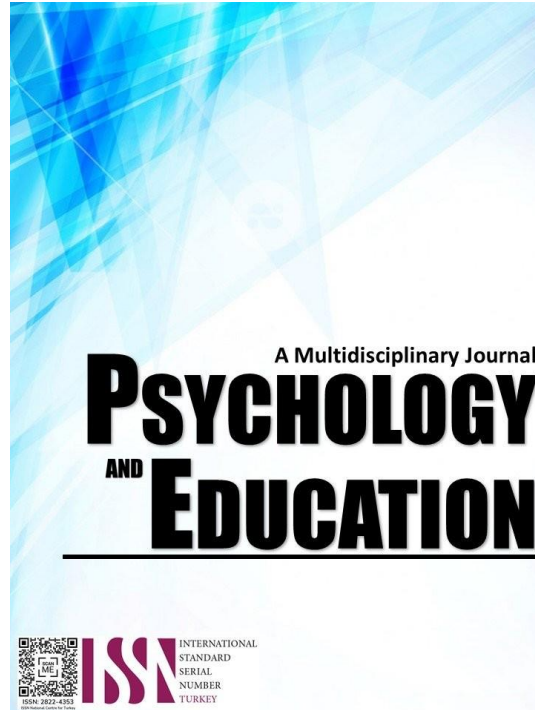


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The Lived Experiences of Teachers in the New Normal: Basis for Management Plan

Louie Jay V. Bohol,* Ma. Elvira A. Geraldizo, Zyndy F. Gerangaya, Arnel R. Omangay, Cyril A. Cabello

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

Teachers in the new normal underline the numerous challenges that educators face while moving to remote teaching and learning methodologies. This study shows that teachers are greatly affected by overwhelming paperwork and in making developmental plans for their students' needs, especially in this new normal. The purpose of this study is to determine the experiences of the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and to perceive a tailored strategic plan for transitioning blended learning for the full face-to-face classes for the teachers. It focuses on understanding and making initiatives towards teachers' development and enhancement of management in the field of teaching. The researcher utilized a purposive sampling procedure in choosing participants of the study who were teaching in DepEd Sta. Catalina National High School. A total of 35 teachers were selected to take part in the study. The study utilized modified Colaizzi's seven-step method (2018) for data analysis. Three (3) major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) The Captured Threat; (2) The Compromised Assessment; and (3) The Call for New Modalities. It is concluded that despite all the difficulties that teachers face, basic education teachers are resilient, especially in teaching and learning in the new normal. When delivering lessons during the pandemic, the teachers turned their weaknesses into opportunities. However, it is recommended that teachers should have seminars and training that can augment the contemporary trends and changes in the educational realm making them ready to face any challenges.

Keywords: *pandemic, new normal, strategies, transition period, challenges*

Introduction

Educators play a vital role in educating learners, but the COVID-19 pandemic challenged them more. The main struggle of the teachers is how to effectively deliver the lessons to the learners during and after the pandemic (Binondo et al., 2023). The Department of Education should address the issues and concerns being raised by the teachers concerning the coping mechanisms of all the possible modalities (Devila et al., 2023). Teachers are known to be versatile and flexible in their way despite the challenges being encountered not until COVID-19 arises which pressed and tested their capacity to forward quality education (Flores et al., 2023). Although the concept of reality during the pandemic was heavily discussed in the literature, the data was not yet saturated because of the geographical concerns and cultural adaptation of the teachers in a school.

According to Cabello et al. (2022), instructors in higher education institutions especially those who are already in the field for quite sometimes are having difficulty in dealing with the challenges and pedagogical adjustments during the pandemic. This study shows that teachers are greatly affected by overwhelming paperwork in making developmental and management plans for their student's needs, especially in this new normal (Riconalla et al., 2022). Teachers should undergo training or workshops, seminars, and all other platforms that would enhance and cope with things during the transition period, especially in technology affordance (Bahinting et al., 2022). With the situation that the teachers are facing today, this research helps to understand and know more about the teachers' experiences during the pandemic and how they managed the transition from one modality to another which will be the basis for a management plan (Delbo et al., 2023).

Teachers, being the second mothers of the learners, are thinking ways on how to contribute meaningfully to the learners as a result, teachers are stressed in many ways (Gantalao et al., 2023). According to Almpanis and Joseph-Richard (2022), during the pandemic, many teachers are emotionally challenged due to overwhelming schoolwork and responsibilities with less sense of direction. Adapting different modalities to deliver quality-based learning to the learners will help society ease the pain being faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mangubat et al., 2022; Villar et al., 2022). Among all other aspects of life, education was one of the most affected when the pandemic hit humanity. With the increasing demands and strict implementations of health protocols, face-to-face modality of teaching and learning was prevented (Gabriel et al., 2022). However, the Department of Education (DepEd) should continue the school year with different learning modalities as indicated in the Philippine Constitution (Ibanez et al., 2022).

The studies above elaborate on the gap that is happening during the transition period from online teaching and learning to face-to-face learning modality (Ando et al., 2022). As indicated in the various studies, locally and internationally, teachers are being challenged physically, socially, financially, and emotionally by the pandemic (Cabello et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these teachers use their coping techniques to better serve the learners (Catulpos et al., 2024). The teachers also showed a sense of readiness despite the situation even if they were compromising already (Binondo et al., 2023). The situations being faced by the teachers as well as the learners (Ogang et al., 2022). The Department of Education under the national government has taken steps in concurring the pandemic for the benefit of the learners.

The national government takes steps to think of better ways to solve a certain problem being faced due to the pandemic, especially for the learners (Gantalao et al., 2023). It is not enough that only the government will think of remedies on how to deal with these most

pressing issues, each person especially the teachers who personally encounter the problem can look for better solutions to the problem by conducting research and studies that can contribute to knowing the more the problem, thinking of the possible solutions, and lastly making essential recommendations which this problem can uncover the lived experiences of the teachers during the pandemic and identifying their coping strategies which other teachers can also take heed with.

Research Questions

This study determined the lived experiences of the Sta. Catalina National High School, Sta. Catalina, Negros Oriental teachers in the new normal as a basis for the management plan, specifically this study answered the following questions:

1. As a teacher, how was your experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the challenges that you encountered during the transition period from modular to full face-to-face classes?
3. What are the coping mechanisms/strategies did you use during the transition period?
4. What life lesson did the pandemic teach you?
5. What strategic plan did you use in transitioning from remote classes to the new normal?
6. What meaningful understanding can be gained from the participants' experiences?

Literature Review

The COVID-19 outbreak has driven educational sectors to accept new pedagogies, including the use of hybrid modalities. Teachers, who are leading the way in providing education in the new standard, have encountered multiple challenges (Bashir et al., 2021). As a result of this transition, for educators to come up with management strategies that can effectively support teachers' teaching and learning practices, it is imperative to understand the personal encounters of the teachers during the transition from one modality to another (DeMatthews et al., 2023). This literature study intends to investigate the related research on teachers' experiences in the new normal and provide methods to create management plans that can support teaching needs and concerns.

Studies highlight some problems they encounter during the transition period and these problems include the need to manage personal and professional duties, as well as limited face-to-face engagement with students (Radina & Balakina, 2021). According to Villar et al. (2022) and Turnbull et al. (2021), teachers stated that they had difficulties adapting to the new technologies and connecting with students as well as parents in a virtual setup. It is also found that the lack of personal interaction between teachers and students also affects the student's academic performance (Lee et al., 2021).

Several strategies have been proposed amid the pandemic to elevate the lives of many people, especially the teachers who need to continue forwarding education despite the challenges (Gautam & Gautam, 2021). As cited by Salendab (2023) and Afonso et al. (2020), the study implies that providing more resources and training to educators can improve their teaching practices in the new normal. Also, giving more assistance and flexibility to teachers can help balance their personal and professional obligations to help them minimize stress and boost work satisfaction (Rahayu & Wirza, 2020). In addition, expanding interaction and cooperation among teachers as well as parents can improve methods of instruction in the new normal (Van der Spoel et al., 2020).

Undeniably, everyone can underline the numerous challenges that educators face while moving to remote teaching and learning methodologies. While establishing effective management strategies, it is critical to consider the specific needs and concerns of teachers. According to the study's findings, providing teachers with tools and proper training will help them in adjusting to remote teaching, provide additional assistance and flexibility, and improve communication and collaboration could all enhance teaching and learning procedures as COVID-19 arises. As a result, management plans must be established with concrete tactics to assist teachers and ensure students' success during the pandemic.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized the Husserl Phenomenology capturing the description of the participants' lived experiences towards a phenomenon. There are 35 teachers at Sta. Catalina National High School who were selected to participate in the conduct of this study through open-ended questions or interviews. The participants are the ones who experienced teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic following the purposive sampling with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only 9 participants made the data saturated.

Instruments

The main instrument of this study is the researcher itself. The secondary instrument was the semi-structured instrument. Teachers who participated in the conduct of this study answered the questions during interviews. Stating their situation during the transition of the phenomenon, whether it was a good or bad experience, what strategies they made, how they managed to face the challenges they encountered especially in the new normal, and what lesson the pandemic taught them.

The researchers made sure to ask permission from the school head before they started gathering the data. After securing the letter of approval, the researchers scheduled the interview. During the interview, the intent of the study was discussed and explained well

especially their participation such that at any time, they can leave the interview session once they feel uncomfortable. They can also decide not to answer all questions and all their answers will be treated with the highest degree of confidentiality.

Statistical Analysis

This study uses purposive sampling in which respondents are selected, teachers who experienced teaching during the pandemic up to the new normal which the respondents are useful for this research. In analyzing the data being gathered this study uses Colaizzi's method which is known as Colaizzi's seven-step method. This method will help this study to analyze, differentiate, and examine the similarities of the narrative responses of the participants. There are five (5) major responses to the study queries that help the researchers analyze by the use of Colaizzi's seven-step method. Purposive sampling with used to choose which to explore in the participants' lived experiences.

Table 1. *The Analysis*

<i>Experiences</i>	<i>Textural Languages</i>	<i>Themes</i>
I have fear in meeting my students because the threat of the virus is still at the surface and I believe I am vulnerable to it since I am aging already (P1).	The Threat at the Surface	The Captured Threat
When transporting going to the school is considered as risky for me. I don't like to be with a lot of people. I think I will have anxiety when I am in public although health protocols are being implemented, still my life is risky (P2).	Risky as it Is	
I am always thinking of being caught by the virus since I have a problem in my pulmonary or immune system. This COVID-19 virus is of great threat to my health (P3).	Health Threat	
During the distribution of the modules and other supplementary materials, I am anxious of talking to parents as some of them are not wearing masks or they are not bringing alcohol and sanitizers which made me think of being transmitted by the virus (P5).	Unsanitary	
I honestly believe that everyone (this means all teachers) has already compromised quality education starting with the way how we check the work of the learners. I usually give passing scores when they submit the modules (P6)	Giving a Passing Score to a Poor Performance	The Compromised Assessment
I can't monitor the progress of my learners because I am preoccupied with the distribution of the modules and how that they can answer all the questions indicated even if their responses are not that good (P8).	Poor Monitoring and Feedbacking	
All the answers of most of my learners are being answered by their parents. This is very obvious and I can see it since I've been in the service for quite sometimes, I know how a parent or a learner answered but I have to accept it, I have no choice at all. I will consider it as if it is the works of my learners (P7).	High Parental Involvement	
As I observed the modules, there are some questions that are not appropriate, some questions are made with mediocrity, and some questions are mistakenly crafted. This is inevitable since everyone was not prepared for the pandemic. The assessment was poorly made, and this makes me sad especially that I know that the questions are made not to assess the learners but just for compliance (P2).	Assessing Without Assessing	
I admit that I am not as young as the newbie teachers and so, I have limited exposure to technological tools and online applications but because of this pandemic, I need to understand that I have to know even the basic ones. Making personalized modules using the Canva application can be one (4).	No Choice At All	The Call for Exploring New Modalities
This pandemic is not just about all the negativities that we all experienced but also about pushing us to see what are other things we can do and other modalities we can utilize and with this what we call learning. We will grow once we are discovering something new. This is my coping mechanism in dealing with the wrath of the pandemic – my mindset or my positive disposition (9).	Learning and Yearning	
The pandemic made me realize that the most important lesson in life is to always rise above the problems or whatever adversities we are experiencing. I always pray. Probably, this is what I can say about coping with what is happening. Prayer moves any mountains. It can move the barrier in front of us teachers in delivering quality instruction. When I had the virus in my system, I just prayed and I am still breathing up until this date. So, just pray (P8).	The Power of Prayer	

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: The Captured Threat

The threat posed by Covid 19 in the workplace was made known to the public-school teachers (Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2021). Their comments make this clear and are well substantiated. The threat of COVID-19 is still present today, especially in public places like schools.

"I have fear in meeting my students because the threat of the virus is still at the surface and I believe I am vulnerable to it since I am aging already." (P1)

"When transporting going to the school is considered as risky for me. I don't like to be with a lot of people. I think I will have anxiety when I am in public although health protocols are being implemented, still, my life is risky." (P2)

"I am always thinking of being caught by the virus since I have a problem in my pulmonary or immune system. This COVID-19 virus is of great threat to my health." (P3)

"During the distribution of the modules and other supplementary materials, I am anxious about talking to parents as some of them are not wearing masks or they are not bringing alcohol and sanitizers which made me think of being transmitted by the virus." (P5)

Teachers and other employees frequently worry about contracting the COVID-19 virus (Baloran & Hernan, 2020; Gillani et al., 2022). People were terrified as COVID-19 spread through the population (Abuhammad et al., 2021). People in communities start to be wary of one another because of the possibility of illness transmission (Roy et al., 2020). Others even fear contracting the virus and getting sick or dying as a result (Yasin, 2020). Due to a persistent worry about contracting the virus, frontline employees, especially teachers, have started to experience anxiety, sadness, and insomnia (Nicomedes & Avila, 2020). COVID-19 is also a source of fear for teachers in public schools.

Theme 2: The Compromised Assessment

According to the participating teachers, there is yet another issue to consider when implementing teaching and learning in the public schools of the Philippines. The most affected one is the way how teachers assess their learners considering that it is on the results that teachers can gauge the academic performance of the students (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2021; Chavez & Lamorinas, 2023). These include the challenge of tracking, providing feedback on, and evaluating learning. Their comments make this clear.

"I honestly believe that everyone (this means all teachers) has already compromised quality education starting with the way how we check the work of the learners. I usually give passing scores when they submit the modules." (P6)

"I can't monitor the progress of my learners because I am preoccupied with the distribution of the modules and how they can answer all the questions indicated even if their responses are not that good." (P8)

"All the answers of most of my learners are being answered by their parents. This is very obvious and I can see it since I've been in the service for quite some time, I know how a parent or a learner answered but I have to accept it, I have no choice at all. I will consider it as if it is the works of my learners." (P7)

"As I observed the modules, there are some questions that are not appropriate, some questions are made with mediocrity, and some questions are mistakenly crafted. This is inevitable since everyone was not prepared for the pandemic. The assessment was poorly made, and this makes me sad especially since I know that the questions are made not to assess the learners but just for compliance." (P2)

The difficulty of monitoring, providing feedback on, and assessing learning is one of the shortcomings of the new norm in Philippine education for public school instructors (Perwitasari et al., 2021; Senel & Senel, 2021). The Department of Education continually issues orders and memos to instructors to address these issues.

Theme 3: The Call for Exploring New Modalities

According to the teachers, they need training on the new normal pedagogies. Learning from these pedagogies is essential in continuing education and providing the best possible learning opportunities among learners (Verde & Valero, 2021; Careaga-Butter et al., 2020). This is presumed from their responses.

"This pandemic is not just about all the negativities that we all experienced but also about pushing us to see what are other things we can do and other modalities we can utilize and with this what we call learning. We will grow once we are discovering something new. This is my coping mechanism in dealing with the wrath of the pandemic – my mindset or my positive disposition." (P4)

"I admit that I am not as young as the newbie teachers and so, I have limited exposure to technological tools and online applications but because of this pandemic, I need to understand that I have to know even the basic ones. Making personalized modules using the Canva application can be one." (P9)

"The pandemic made me realize that the most important lesson in life is to always rise above the problems or whatever adversities we are experiencing. I always pray. Probably, this is what I can say about coping with what is happening. Prayer moves any mountains. It can move the barrier in front of us teachers in delivering quality instruction. When I had the virus in my system, I just prayed and I am still breathing up until this date. So, just pray." (P8)

The different teachers in public schools are having a rough transition of the pedagogy they are utilizing inside the classroom and even the content is being compromised (Gurung & Stone, 2023). Even college professors who had greater experience with online and remote instruction had trouble adapting to the new normal since no one had adequately prepared them for these unheard-of circumstances

(Cabello et al., 2022).

For legislators, educators, and teachers, the quick transition from face-to-face instruction to new learning modes presents a significant challenge (Atwa et al., 2022; Mbandlwa, 2021). Anxiety and fear over how to instruct students were brought on by the new pedagogical techniques in the era of the new standard (Lambie & Law, 2020). According to the teacher participants' replies, teachers need to be better equipped with the new standard teaching pedagogies, whether it be online or remote teaching (Petek et al., 2023; Al-Nasheri & Alhalafawy, 2023).

Conclusion

The sole purpose of this study is to know the experiences of the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and to think of a strategic management plan for transitioning blended learning to full face-to-face classes for the teacher's welfare. Despite all the difficulties they face, the basic education teachers' resilient approach to teaching and learning in the new normal was clear. For teacher educators in the new normal, the COVID-19 epidemic presented strengths, weaknesses, possibilities, and threats. When delivering lessons during the pandemic, the teachers turned their weaknesses into opportunities.

Module making, distribution of the modules, new aspects in teaching that are not familiar to the teachers, teachers used to traditional teaching, thinking of different strategies, adapting new facilities, and others are the common concerns of the teachers which the Department of Education should think of better ways on how to overcome these challenges. This shows how the teachers struggled during the Covid-19 pandemic until the new normal. Therefore, DepEd should conduct training, seminars, and orientation on how to use different modalities in teaching that would help develop their capabilities that would apply in a teaching-learning process. In that way, it would somehow help not just the teachers but also the learners as well.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Louie Jay V. Bohol

Metro Dumaguete College – Philippines

Ma. Elvira A. Geraldizo

Sta. Catalina National High School

Department of Education – Philippines

Zyndy F. Gerangaya

Department of Education – Philippines

Arnel R. Omangay

Sta. Catalina National High School

Department of Education – Philippines

Cyril A. Cabello, PhD

Cebu Technological University – Philippines