

Pedagogical problems and coping strategies of elementary teachers during a pandemic

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Abstract

This descriptive correlational study anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory identified the pedagogical problems met and the coping strategies adapted by elementary school teachers during the pandemic in one school district in the Division of Aklan during the height of the pandemic in 2021. This also tried to find out the extent of pedagogical problems experienced by the teacher respondents related to curriculum, fellow teachers, learners, school, and parents, and the coping strategies applied to manage the problems they encountered. Forty-six grade school teachers purposively selected in the identified elementary schools in the district participated in the study. A researcher-made survey questionnaire validated by experts was used in the gathering of data. Findings revealed that teacher respondents were between 31-40 years old, mostly female and single, with average monthly income from 10,000 to 20,000, travel less than 6 km from their homes to the work station, and are proficient in terms of ICT competence. The extent of pedagogical problems experienced by the respondents related to curriculum and fellow teachers was slightly a challenge; and to learners, school-related aspects, and parents as not at all considered as challenges. To cope with these challenges, the respondents' top three activities were attending webinars for professional growth, enjoying quality time with their families, and going to and praying in the church. These imply that grade school teachers are more particular about improving themselves professionally and strengthening their faith in God than doing other things that affect their physical and mental health.

Keywords: *pedagogical problems, coping strategies, elementary teachers, pandemic, curriculum, descriptive correlation*

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Introduction

The outbreak of the pandemic in 2019 has affected almost all aspects of life around the globe – from political governance to basic services, including education. As schools were closed to cope with the global pandemic, students, parents, and educators have felt the unexpected ripple effect of this pandemic. While governments, frontline workers, and health officials are doing their best in slowing down the outbreak, education systems are trying to continue imparting quality education to all during these difficult times.

Since classroom learning delivery by teachers has been stopped and face-to-face classes were replaced by distance learning through synchronous and asynchronous modalities, modules have been popularly used as a substitute in behalf of teachers' presence supplemented by videos played up on television and social media. Grade school learners got emotionally and mentally frantic while parents grope as home mentors. The teacher, who is considered the second mother of a student, is having a tough time addressing the new normal. As was observed in many schools in the Division of Aklan, almost all teachers received the most challenging tasks from the preparation of the learning materials to facing and resolving complaints from wards and parents. They remain steadfast as they seem and this is worth looking into. Thus, it would be noteworthy to determine the pedagogical challenges that teachers face as they complete their tasks, and what coping mechanisms they used to adapt to these concerns. Specifically, it aimed to establish the demographic profile of the respondents, their ICT competence, the extent of pedagogical problems they experienced, and the extent of various adaptive strategies applied by the teachers to manage the pedagogical problems they have encountered. Likewise, it would be significant if the relationships between the demographic profile of the respondents and the extent of pedagogical problems experienced by them, the extent of various adaptive strategies they apply to manage the pedagogical problems they have encountered, and the extent of pedagogical problems as experienced by the teachers and the extent of various adaptive strategies applied by them to manage the pedagogical problems they have encountered.

This study was anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory (1984, as cited by Chowdhury, 2020) and the Career Adaptability Theory (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) which define an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, and traumas in their occupational roles that alter their social integration to

either a large or small degree. These two models served as points of reference in the gathering, analyses, and interpretation of data on pedagogical problems and coping mechanisms of respondents.

Methodology

The descriptive correlational research design was used in this study as it investigates relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. A correlation reflects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. The direction of a correlation can be either positive or negative (Bhandari, 2021). It also used a one-shot survey to collect the necessary data from the respondents. This design is suitable for the study because its main objective was to describe the characteristics of the respondents as well as their identified pedagogical problems and coping strategies.

The respondents of this study were all the 46 elementary grade teachers with permanent plantilla positions in the identified cluster schools in one of the districts in the Division of Aklan.

A researcher-made survey questionnaire consisting three parts was used in gathering data. Part I collected the demographic characteristics; Part II gathered information about the pedagogical problems met during the pandemic; and Part III asked about the coping strategies to manage the challenges. This questionnaire was subjected to content validation and pilot-tested for reliability.

To establish the demographic profile, pedagogical problems, and coping strategies of the respondents, percentage, mean, frequency and rank using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences was utilized. The relationship between two variables whether significant or not was based on the p-value of 0.50% generated by the computer. The level of correlation was based on the scale adapted from Dancey and Reidy (2006).

Findings

Based on the data gathered, interpreted, and analyzed, results showed that most of the teacher respondents were within the age range of 31-40 years old (17 or 37%), female (39 or 84.8%), and single (38 or 82.6%). Majority of the respondents (37 or 80.4%) reside less than 6 km away from the school while only four or 8.7% reside 11-15 km away from the school.

As to average family income, 21 or 45.7% of them have Php 10,000 - Php 20,000 income, with 16 or 34.78% earning an average monthly income of between Php 21,000 - Php 30,000. As to level of ICT competence, 18 or 39.1% of the respondents are proficient, 17 or 37.0% are approaching proficient while only two or 4.4% have advanced level of proficiency.

The extent of pedagogical problems experienced by the respondents to curriculum-related aspects and teacher-related aspects had overall means of 1.62 and 1.57, respectively, described as slightly a challenge. Pedagogical problems experienced under the learner-related, school-related, and parent-related aspects had overall means of 1.10, 1.31, and 1.09, respectively, all described as not at all a challenge.

The various coping strategies applied by the teacher respondents to manage the pedagogical challenges they have encountered included the top three coping strategies: attending webinars for professional growth, enjoying quality time with their families, and going to church and praying. Blogging through social media and drinking liquors were the last activities they would do to manage the problems brought about by the pandemic.

The relationship between the demographic profile in terms of age and civil status of the respondents, and the extent of pedagogical problems that included curriculum-related, teacher-related, learner-related, parent-related, and school-related aspects was found as significant. No significant relationship was established between gender and average monthly income while all pedagogical related problems, except for school-related and curriculum-related aspects, had significant relationships. The relationship between ICT competence and all the pedagogical-related problems was found to be highly significant.

The relationship between demographic profile of the respondents and the extent of various coping strategies applied by them to manage the pedagogical challenges they encountered was found to be significant in terms of age, gender, and distance of residence from school but not significant in terms of average monthly income. Only in ICT competence that the coping strategies had a highly significant relationship. Finally, the relationship between the extent of pedagogical problems as experienced by the respondents and the extent of various adaptive strategies applied by them to manage the pedagogical challenges they encountered were all found to be highly significant.

Conclusion

Most of the teachers employed in the cluster schools of a district in the Division of Aklan are in their mid-adulthood, single females with 6-10 years in service residing near the schools, earning monthly income of between Php 10,000 – Php 20,000, and are proficient in ICT.

Problems encountered by teachers during the pandemic are not at all a challenge. They may just have been moved by the eventual change of modality but they have fast recovered from the challenges they met during the height of the health emergency.

The flexibility and resilience of the teachers during emergencies are observable as expressed by the modes of coping they have selected to maintain a positive outlook despite the problems that come their way (Agayon et al., 2022). Coping strategies depend upon the age, gender, distance of residence from schools, and competence in ICT but not on income. The coping strategies they adopt depend upon the pedagogical problems they encounter.

Thus, it is apparent that school administrators should likewise consider as important the physical and mental health of the teachers as this affect their performance and the service they deliver to their learners. The conduct of annual activities such as gender and development programs, outdoor human capability building workshops, and benchmarking opportunities to enhance, revitalize and energize teachers in their day-to-day challenges may be an option.

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