



Lived Experiences, Challenges, and Coping Mechanisms of Teachers on the Current Paradigm Shift in Education: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which aimed to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of teachers in the public school both in elementary and secondary schools in Malolos, Bulacan. The findings of this study revealed that most teachers are significantly challenged with the poor internet connection, multitasking and multitudes of paperwork to be submitted, communication with the parents and teachers and the different modalities of learning which are cited as the contributing factors of stress and anxiety. As to the experiences of the teachers, they became a module writer, online teacher, reporter while doing the online classes and juggling with the work at home as a homemaker. However, the good experiences of this pandemic brought realization to the teachers that they were able to unleash their potential and utilized the skills needed to survive in this difficult time. Moreover, teachers coped up with the situations through prayers, listening and watching motivational videos, yoga and others became farmers too just to avoid stress. Finally, the teachers also gave their suggestions to further help other teachers also who are struggling during this pandemic. Majority of the participants gave emphasis to focus on stabilizing mental health. Others also highlighted the need to seek the assistance of other people who are knowledgeable in terms of ICT. Continuing innovation and researching to update oneself was also one of the suggested ways to deal with the current paradigm shift in education.

Keywords: challenges, coping mechanisms, experiences, online learning, paradigm shift

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers are considered the second parents of the children away from home. Their value and role in shaping education are indeed very vital and significant. When the COVID-19 began to proliferate its effect across the globe, the teachers along with the students felt the drastic effect. The Philippines could be a high-risk nation from the coronavirus outbreak and in addition to that, different variants of the virus are being discovered by medical experts. According to Scafe (2020), the effect of the virus induced a substantial degree of fear, worry, and stress. The sad truth about the devastating effect of COVID-19 is limitless, whether the person is rich or poor, it discriminates against no one.

Blessinger (2018) explained that a paradigm is technically referring to a framework or example which encompasses the practices, principles, models, theories, etc. Basically in the current scale, the paradigm shift in education around the world posed so many challenges for educators and policymakers. In the Philippines alone, the Department of Education (DepEd) has received so many complaints and generates problems as to how this present circumstance be addressed. The teacher however faced the most crucial state as to how he or she could maneuver the class given the current internet problem in the country as well as the limited resources available.

In a study conducted by Schaffhauser (2020), almost 9 out of 10 teachers feel incredibly stressed brought on by the sudden paradigm shift in the education system. Teachers felt anxious, following the sudden change due to the pandemic. On the other hand, the survey also revealed that 81% of the teachers who are also educators who served as respondents in the study are putting in more than 14 hours a day to finish their professional duties and responsibilities. Another case study regarding the state of teachers and students conducted in Stockholm, Sweden emphasized and revealed that any sudden change in the environment causes disparity and even depression across the teachers. This is specifically mentioning the heads of educational institutions (Ramberg, 2019). Teachers do not situate themselves well in the blended classroom and other forms of learning as explained by Dziuban, et al., (2018). This finding focuses on the online learning states on the problems in the classes. These teachers were not trained or educated on the virtual platforms, hence, this gives confusion and causes distress across the learning community. In addition to that, Nyambongi (2014) also reiterated the stress caused by the manifestation to public school teachers at the secondary level. This finding proved that one of the primary reasons for teachers' stress is time and concern for students. It is indeed truthful knowledge that educators are responsible for their student's well-being, emotionally and mentally.

In the last year 2020, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) published a report discussing the adjustments of teachers and students with regards to the pandemic's current state. It was also thoroughly discussed that health and education are two critical ideas that must not overlap each other. They both have different stands and roles regarding dealing with the current situation.

In this paradigm shift in education, teachers in the new normal would have to employ the necessary skills and practices of both management professionally and emotionally. They should be adaptive to the current situation especially with the utilization of technology and different digital recreational activities and forums (Wyman, 2020). Moreover, the burnout among elementary, middle school, and high school teachers was evidently shown in the study conducted by Pajarianto et al., (2020). The finding of this study summarized that a work from the home analysis showed that teachers were incapable of prioritizing their mental health. It is therefore that these teachers felt sudden burnout on the sudden change of the school system.

In China, a study conducted by Huang & Zhao (2020) found that 35.1% of teachers and students presented moderate symptoms of anxiety and 21% moderate symptoms of depression, whereas, in Germany, teachers experienced a medium-to-high amount of stress during lockdown (Klapproth, et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom (UK), teachers reported high levels of anxiety (Allen et al., 2020) and, in Chile, the pandemic negatively affected teachers' quality of life, especially among women and younger teachers (Lizana, et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, the study conducted by Granton (2020) showed that the Filipino teachers are mostly and adamantly stressed due to lack of budget, and here it was also revealed that teachers are in

distress of looking for ways to ensure that their students would meet the educational quality state despite the less budget they received from the government. The Philippine Government (2020) crafted coping guidelines designed to help the teachers and educators to adapt to the emerging shift in the educational system. Guidance and counseling are still available in the virtual context just to help the teachers and students adapt to the changes.

According to the study conducted in the Philippines, one of the biggest contributors and factors influencing the preparedness of students and teachers to engage in this new normal is stress and mental state (Calao & Yazon, 2020). Tria (2020) revealed in her findings that the majority of the teachers in the Philippines are not psychologically nor skilled prepared for the drastic changes in the education system. This was published in the study viewed the pandemic through educational lenses. Consequently, another local study examining how teachers deal with anxiety here in the country showed that most fundamental reform teachers had done developing different and creative teaching styles which enabled and helped them be more connected and updated to their students despite the limited resources and interactions (Talidad et al., 2020).

During this pandemic, the most influential parts are played by the schools' partners. Considerably, they are the ones at a misfortune and are relinquishing either financially or scholastically. The specific information accumulated is expected to clarify the issues and give substantial recommendations on the best way to direct natural capacities conceivably during the pandemic (Gonzales, 2020). In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought school closures and constrained clinical schools in the Philippines and unexpectedly moved to an online educational plan without proper training and consultation. Alongside, the Department of Education (DepEd) spearheaded by the secretary of education mandated that no children will be left behind during this time of the pandemic. The significance of setting in the turn of events and practices of educators are widely implemented.

To contribute to the growing literature on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators, this study turned its focus to the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms and the suggested ways which could be very helpful for teachers during this very challenging period of education now that it is shifted to the new normal. More specifically, this research aimed to gauge the live experiences of the educators so that a proper action plan will be designed and implemented to ensure the welfare and safety of our teachers and learners most especially during the time of the pandemic.

Research Questions

The present study aimed to know and describe the lived experiences, challenges and coping mechanisms faced by the teacher on the paradigm shift in education brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What are the lived experiences by the teachers on the sudden paradigm shift in education brought by the pandemic?
2. What are the challenges faced by the teachers on the sudden paradigm shift in education brought by the pandemic?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of the teachers in dealing with the paradigm shift in education brought by the pandemic?
4. What suggestions can be made to help the other teachers cope up with the present pandemic?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). According to Smith & Osborn (2015), this approach aims to give a definite assessment of the personal lived experiences. Furthermore, it is also explicitly idiographic in its purpose to examine at a very detailed context the experiences of each case. This methodology became very useful during the interview process by the participants (Gula, 2022).

Participants

The participants of this study employed ten (10) public school teachers. Five of them are from the secondary level while the remaining five are from the elementary level. All teachers were selected regardless of their demographic profile if they were willing enough to answer the questions from the interview truthfully and honestly.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher sought the permission of the participants by sending them letters regarding the flow of the research as well as its interview process. After securing their permission, one-on-one virtual interviews were conducted. The data privacy act was given high regard during the interview. All answers were kept confidential. The answers were carefully analyzed and treated with utmost confidentiality to protect the anonymity of the concerned individuals. More so, it was also ensured that the gathered information all abided by the rules of the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Data Analysis

This study made use of the qualitative means of analyzing the gathered data. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the responses from the participants (Gula, 2022). The interview transcripts were translated properly to the exact verbatim to avoid uncertainties and confusion of the data collection contents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following sections present the analysis of data arranged in themes namely (1) lived experiences, (2) challenges faced, (3) coping mechanisms, and (4) suggestions or suggested ways to cope up with the current shift in education.

1. Lived Experiences

Table 1. *Lived experiences themes*

| | |
|--|---|
| Teachers experienced stress due to lack of sleep, workloads, and medical condition | 3 |
| Teachers gained appreciation from the situation | 2 |
| Teachers realized their full potentials | 2 |
| Multi-faceted teachers like a module writer, adviser, reporter, online teacher | 2 |
| Teachers struggled in ICT | 1 |

The results revealed in table 1 that teachers became multi-faceted during this pandemic. One participant answered that more than being a teacher, she became a writer, adviser, and online teacher, and reporter. Below are the actual scripts:

“During this pandemic, more than a teacher who discusses the lesson, I became a writer, adviser, and an online teacher. Never that Have imagined writing a module for my students”. - Participant No. 1

“During this difficult time, I became a module writer, a reporter, etc. I had to create my own materials for the students because of the limited resources provided by the Department of Education. I had to craft my own materials. - Participant No. 4

Other participants answered that they experienced so much stress due to lack of sleep and they were bombarded with so much paperwork with limited time given to prepare them and submit those assignments to their superior.

“It is stressful as we need to adjust from face to face to online”. - Participant No. 3

“There are many things to do. Aside from preparing the needed materials for the online classes, there are other reports that need to be submitted. There were times that I became stressed”.- Participant No. 4.

“I am experiencing stress and anxiety due to my health conditions”. - Participant No. 7

Likewise, some participants explained that their lives turned into 360 degrees turn because of the pandemic especially with the use of ICT to teach the students in this new normal.

“A 360 degree turn where my audience is a mere screen instead of faces, a dilemma with the use of ICT for the benefit of my learners; sleepless nights in doing tons of paperwork such as reports, modules, activity sheets, video lessons, scripts, lesson plans and many more.” - Participant No. 5

The sentiments given by the participants are supported by the study of Barnes (2018). In his study, it was revealed that teaching is exhausting, especially in things that are hard to miss and forget. Furthermore, Barnes also added that teachers are multidimensional especially when grades are not yet done, there are other meetings to attend to and lessons to be made. Teachers are more stressed and feel anxieties too.

Part of the lived experiences from the participants are also seeing the good sides of this pandemic. Such that they viewed that teachers become skillful in terms of the utilization of the ICT whether it is an asynchronous or synchronous setting. Another thing also is that the pandemic taught them to manage their time and learned the art of surviving in teaching in the new normal. Being flexible is also seen by the teachers and most especially they were able to realize their full potential. They managed to bring out the best among themselves. The following scripts are the exact verbatim of their answers:

“The good side of this pandemic is that teachers feel more appreciation than before. This pandemic has opened many parents’ eyes to how hard it is to be a teacher and even harder because of the situation. The teacher can learn and utilize technology in teaching. Also, the teachers widen their understanding towards the students and to be more positive and flexible”. Participant No. 2

“It helped me realize and unleash my potential. Such that, never I have imagined that I could write and create my own teaching materials. I engaged in so many online platforms before I only knew how to use Facebook. These are the things I only discovered during these most challenging times.” - Participant No. 8

“This pandemic enables the teachers to utilize what the technology offers in order that remote teaching and learning would take place. The teachers become more skillful in the use of ICT to conduct online classes, whether synchronous or asynchronous.” - Participant No. 10

“I was able to survive reaching and making learning possible among my students despite lots of changes in the educational process.” - Participant No. 9

2. Challenges

Table 2. *Challenge’s themes*

| | |
|---|---|
| Poor internet connectivity | 4 |
| Communication with parents & students | 3 |
| Multi-tasking (homemaker, online teacher, attending webinars) | 3 |

Table 2 section discusses the challenges and struggles faced by the teachers during this time of the pandemic. Poor internet connectivity (Núñez, 2021) gave the most common answers among the interviewed participants. Below shows the scripts:

“The challenges I’ve encountered is the low internet connectivity and disturbance during online classes.” - Participant No. 1

“The present condition of internet connectivity is one of the challenges that I have encountered. The connectivity was weak. I also experienced disconnection during online classes because of poor internet signal”. -Participant No. 3

“Internet connection lost. A lot of printing materials. Students are hard to contact. Parents are answering assignments instead of students.” - Participant No. 6

“Well, the poor internet connection is one. Second is the students are not even opening their cameras, I don't know exactly if they are sleeping during the discussion. The third is the authenticity of the answers being submitted. For sure, parents are helping their children with the activities given to them.” - Participant No. 10

Another struggle of the participants are students are hard to contact or sometimes the parents are the one answering the activities given to the students. In addition, the use of different learning platforms in educating learners became a struggle too. Thus, it added to difficulty as to how to impart the knowledge effectively during this pandemic.

“Students are hard to contact. Parents are answering assignments instead of students.” - Participant No. 9

“Using different platforms in educating the learners (modular, online synchronous and asynchronous, and radio-based) all at the same.”- Participant No. 2

“Right now, it is really difficult to impart the knowledge effectively given the present chaos that we are experiencing in the world of education.” - Participant No. 7

Teachers’ challenges also include the difficulty of separating the work from home scheme to the normal work as a homemaker. Some of them worked beyond their official time because of the seminars they must attend. They also need to answer the queries from the students and parents 24/7.

“It is very difficult when to separate the actual work at home as a homemaker from the work from the home scheme of the DepEd.” - Participant No. 4

“I worked overtime beyond the official time just to answer my students and do the paperwork which most of the time was given in a short period of time.” - Participant No.5

“I cannot understand also, we are now in this very very diffuse situation but lots of webinars are given. We cannot really focus on our jobs. To add also, 24/7 regardless of the time frame, I am obliged to answer the queries from the parents and students which made my gadgets open all the time.” - Participant No. 8

3. Coping Mechanisms

Table 3. Coping mechanism's themes

| | |
|--|---|
| Teachers' way of coping is through prayers, inspirational videos, meditation, and yoga | 5 |
| Planting or farming | 5 |

Table 3 highlights prayers, meditation, yoga and watching inspirational videos are most of the coping mechanisms of the teachers. Asking for divine guidance to overcome all the challenges is seen by the teachers in this very difficult time. Watching devotional videos and sometimes online shopping also is their way to cope.

“I prayed a lot, and sometimes or most of the time after a certain task I do online shopping.” - Participant No. 1

“I watch inspirational videos and movies. I plant vegetables in the garden. I have my family whom I can talk to when I experience stress.”- Participant No. 6

“ I always believe in prayers and my faith that this pandemic is only temporary made me cope with it.” - Participant No. 3

“Watching inspirational videos and listening to the speakers somehow lighten my day. Made me think that we are not the only ones affected by this chaos. When I think of that way, it helps me cope with our situation.” - Participant No. 2

“My coping mechanisms? Yes, I do yoga. It helped a lot in this difficult situation that we are in.” - Participant No. 7

Other participants also responded that keeping themselves hydrated throughout is one way of coping. Doing mental exercises and collaborating with other co-teachers to avoid anxieties and stress is also observed by some participants.

“To live day by day, I cope up by entertaining only the positive things. I keep myself hydrated to avoid stress. I do mental exercises too just to cope. Sometimes, I collaborate and talk to my co-teachers just to release my anxieties during this difficult era in our educational system.” - Participant No. 5

“Coping up in this very challenging time, as a teacher I always communicate with my co-workers discussing how we can be better. I made sure to ask them their strategic ways to make things lighter.” - Participant No. 8

Teachers also become farmers just to cope up and find a way to ease the situation.

“I plant vegetables in the garden. I have my family whom I can talk to when I experience stress.” - Participant No. 4

“I became a plant advocate. Planting flowers are my way of coping up with the situation.” -Participant No. 9

“It may sound funny but believe me my coping mechanism is planting indoor plants. Should I say, plantita. Yes, it is very helpful.” - Participant No. 10

4. Suggestions

Table 3. *Suggestion's themes*

| | |
|---|---|
| Focus on maintaining good mental health | 5 |
| Collaborate with others on the use of ICT | 2 |
| Do research and innovations | 2 |
| Upgrade oneself through video tutorials (YouTube) | 1 |

Table 4 focuses on the suggested ways given by the participants as to how they could provide help to other teachers also especially in the public sector. Most of the participants' suggestions tackled to give more emphasis on mental health, collaborate virtually to ease the anxieties, and focus on positives to make them happy.

“I would like to advise the teachers to focus more on strengthening their mental health. They must be strong to fight the environmental pressure brought by this pandemic. Always read the Bible, it helps a lot. Know that we are not alone in this battle. Instead of dealing with the problem alone, go out virtually and explore the online world through communication and exchanging of thoughts from other people.” - Participant No. 1

“Teachers, I would like to say that as we perform our duties and responsibilities, we should not forget to focus also on the stability of our minds. Our mental health is as important as our physical health.” - Participant No. 5

“Collaborate with other teachers. Those who are struggling with anxieties, go out virtually.” - Participant No. 6

“Mental health is very important, please give emphasis to that. Remember teachers, the department of education will not give you medicines if you become sick. Just live calmly. Don't worry things will be better soon.” - Participant No. 8

Another important suggestion made by the participants is to seek help from others who are well versed in technological aspects. Admittedly, there are so many teachers who are struggling with the integration of technology in online classes.

“Since we frequently use ICT at this time of the pandemic, keep an open mind even if you belong to generation x or in older generations however if you are one of the millennial teachers. Do not keep your knowledge and expertise to yourself. Seek help to those who are knowledgeable on that aspect.” - Participant No. 2.

“Do not pretend as if you know everything. If you think you are not capable of doing things which involve technology like ICT things, ask someone to assist you.” - Participant No. 3

“Honestly, I am not good at computers. I would like to suggest to other teachers also to update yourselves. There are so many tutorials on Youtube which are easy to follow. Just upgrade yourself if you think you don't like others to teach you.” - Participant No.4

Lastly, participants suggested finding ways to research and innovate because they believe that this pandemic is only temporary.

“Collaborate, research, innovate and believe that teachers can always be a blessing to the students no matter what situation we are in.” - Participant No. 7

“Do research work. Keep on upgrading no matter what situation you are in. We are teachers, so we should keep ourselves updated.” - Participant No. 9

“My suggestion is to keep on researching. Who knows, while doing your research, you can discover something more beneficial like medicines to remove the virus.” - Participant No. 1

Discussions

This research primarily focuses on understanding the lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms of the teachers on the current paradigm shift in education brought by global pandemic COVID-19. Suggestions also from the participants were taken into considerations as to how they could provide help to other educators in the field to be able to boost their morale in this difficult time. The findings of this study were attained by conducting an online or virtual interview one by one. The responses from the participants expanded these four important themes. The results from the previous sections will be discussed and interpreted thoroughly in part of the study.

Focusing on the lived experiences of the participants, most of them experienced stress and anxieties due to lack of sleep. That lack of sleep is because students and parents kept on calling them or even texting without observing proper time. In addition, teachers prepared their reports to be submitted in a very little time span. Workloads too are not given fairly. There are some teachers who have good workloads like the sections assigned to them. Some received very challenging sections. Part of the experiences related to teachers' stress in the poor health condition. Given the difficult situation, some participants could not complain. Consequently, the teachers became multitaskers. Some became a reporter, module writer, online teacher, and adviser. With these, they managed to still look at the good side of the situation. The current paradigm shifts in education made them realize their full potential. Never that they thought of becoming a multidimensional teacher. Truly, they also gained appreciation from other people especially the parents and educators. The essence and value of being a teacher are evidently appreciated in all aspects of life. That is

part of their lived experiences. As revealed, the lived experiences of the participants are a mixture of good and challenging dimensions.

With regards to the challenges, first and foremost many of the participants cited the poor internet connection as a major problem. It is a truthful scenario in our country. The poor internet connection could not sustain a desirable online class, thus students and teachers suffered from the situation. Alongside the poor internet connection is the mode of communication to the parents. It is very difficult to reach the parents, especially since they are also working. Sometimes, they do not respond to the teachers' calls. Miscommunication happened also to both parties. Lastly, the multitude of tasks given to the teacher in a day made the situation more challenging. For instance, the superior texted the teacher to submit the reports right away, then the teacher attended her online class then eventually she will be given another assignment to attend a webinar. The teachers do not know where to start, when to start and which one should be given attention first. These challenges posed an uncomfortable situation among public school teachers.

Furthermore, the coping mechanisms of the participants in this difficult situation merely relied on prayers and positivity. Meditation, yoga, and other inspirational talks helped them cope up with the situation. The teachers clung to prayers and motivational videos. They believed that it was the best way to cope up with the situation. Others also do mental exercises to avoid negativities. The participants also responded that planting plants helped a lot to cope with the situation. After doing the online class and checking the modules, they plant indoor and outdoor plants. That way, they felt relaxed after a long day of working virtually.

Lastly, suggestions have been made by the participants to further reach other teachers also to cope with the situation. The biggest number of suggestions was to focus on strengthening the mental health of other teachers. Mental health is as important as physical health that should be given much emphasis, especially during COVID-19. There are many ways to strengthen mental health by collaborating and talking with other people (Núñez, 2021). Releasing the negativities through exercises that could boost the immune system. Another suggestion made was to seek help from others if the teachers struggled with the technical aspect like in the integration of ICT in the lesson. There are also video tutorials available on the internet which offer ICT enhancements for free. To add, it was also suggested to innovate themselves through research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study emphasized the importance of understanding the lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of the public-school teachers so that they can be given help by the department of education. Based on the interview results, the teachers are significantly challenged by (1) poor internet connection, (2) multitude of workloads, (3) unfair distribution of teaching loads, and (4) establishing a good communication of the parents. Furthermore, the current paradigm shifts in education made them realize their full potential and maximize their skills to perform the following tasks as (1) module writer, (reporter), (3) online teacher, and (adviser). The multifaceted sides of being a teacher in this difficult time are highlighted. As to the coping mechanisms, the participants clung to prayers, devotional and inspirational videos to make them cope. Yoga also was seen to deal with the present situation. Furthermore, many participants ventured into becoming farmers like planting plants to make them feel relaxed and as their way of coping up with COVID-19. Lastly, suggestions have been made by the participants as to how they could help other public school teachers to (1) focus on strengthening their mental health, (2) seek assistance from others who are knowledgeable specifically in the ICT, (3) continue innovating themselves through research, and most of all (4) focus only on positivity and release the negativities in order to live normally despite the challenges brought by the global pandemic.

The researcher further recommended that this research be submitted to the division office so that the superintendent and other officials could devise a plan as to how they can give assistance to the teachers. Principals also should investigate the status of the teachers individually and possibly create a team of experts to investigate the medical and mental state of the teachers.

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