

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2024, Vol. 5, No. 6, 2037 – 2044

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.05.06.07>

## Research Article

### Voyaging Through Uncharted Territories: A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Education Amidst the New Normal

Yehlen S. Magbanua\*

Kapaya Elementary School, Kapaya, Bagumbayan, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines

#### Article history:

Submission June 2024

Revised June 2024

Accepted June 2024

#### \*Corresponding author:

E-mail:

[fahadabdul163@gmail.com](mailto:fahadabdul163@gmail.com)

#### ABSTRACT

As the world slowly recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that we will not be returning to the world we once knew. Instead, we are adapting to a "New Normal" - a world where we must learn to coexist with the virus. This new way of life vastly differs from what we were accustomed to, and every aspect of our lives has been impacted. Teachers have a significant role in shaping the future of education, and they, too, have been affected by the pandemic. In this study, we sought to understand the challenges and issues public elementary school teachers face in the Philippines due to the pandemic. We employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, selecting nine participants who shared their experiences. Through our analysis, we identified seven themes, including lack of communication, parents' low levels of education, insufficient time for printing modules, teachers' out-of-pocket expenses, difficulty in assessing learners' academic performance, the need for professional growth, and teachers' positive response to the changes. Despite their challenges, these teachers remain resilient and motivated to adapt to the new normal. Despite the difficulties, they continue to work hard to ensure their pupils receive quality education.

**Keywords:** *Education, Elementary, New Normal, Phenomenology, Teacher, Voyage*

#### Introduction

In contrast to the typical routine, the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly transformed everyday life into a new normal two years ago. One industry that has been notably affected is education, with school closures and educators needing more clarification about their responsibilities and how to maintain communication with students to ensure continuous learning

(Salendab, 2023). The Philippines is among the few countries where schools have remained closed since the start of the coronavirus outbreak last year. To facilitate learning continuity amid the ongoing public health emergency, the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) will continue to guide the provision of basic education for the 2021-2022 school year. To ensure the continuous delivery of learning

#### How to cite:

Magbanua, Y. S. (2024). Voyaging Through Uncharted Territories: A Phenomenological Study of Elementary Education Amidst the New Normal. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 5(6), 2037 – 2044. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.05.06.07

opportunities while prioritizing the health and safety of staff and students, DepEd will utilize various learning delivery modalities (LDMS), including home-schooling, blended learning, and remote learning. (See Enclosure to DepEd Order No. 032, s. 2021)

One sort of learning that takes place when students and teachers are in different places at the same time is called distance learning (Alferrez et al., 2023). This implies that physical presence in a classroom or school is not required. Three methods are available for distance learning: TV/radio-based instruction, online distance learning (ODL), and modular distance learning (MDL). MDL is the most widely used form of remote learning in our nation. Currently, this learning mode is used in all public schools since, according to a Department of Education poll, 8.8 million parents prefer MDL. Parents whose children are enrolled in school this academic year most like to use printed modules for their remote learning needs. This is because some students live in remote locations without access to the internet. Also, parents would rather their kids spend less time in front of a device.

Shifting to remote learning presents both opportunities and challenges. It alters the educational environment, where parents, teachers, and students encounter challenges within the confines of the established educational system (Vicente & Salendab, 2022). Despite these obstacles, teachers are still responsible for maintaining high learning standards, even when in-person interactions are unavailable. This includes assigning assignments, administering assessments, printing and distributing modules to guarantee that every learner receives their Self-Learning Modules (SLMs), and delivering performance tasks. As a result, research was conducted to determine how primary school instructors handled the change to the new regular school system.

### ***Review of Related Literature***

COVID – 19 pandemic has tremendously changed the educational landscape worldwide. Researchers explore various components of this educational shift such as the challenges, adaptations and emerging practices in what is called the “new normal”.

The shift from traditional classroom set up to online learning modality posed various challenges and problems among teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders. According to Daniel (2020), this abrupt change significantly require teachers to go beyond the traditional classroom practices such as adapting digital tools and practices in the new normal education. Salendab (2023) stressed out that teachers play a crucial role in the students' development even and makes the learning possible no matter what the situation is. The sudden change in the educational landscape highlighted the digital divide and differences in access to technology which affects the quality learning of the students.

Moreover, it is important to note also that teachers and students in this transition period became a significant concern in all educational sectors. Kim and Asbury (2020) highlighted that teachers are challenged with various issues and concerns as to this transition which increased their stress and workload, while students faced various problems such as emotional and social problems since students were isolated and were unable to have the face-to-face interactions with their teachers, students, and peers.

On the other hand, COVID – 19 pandemic also influence the enrolment rates of the elementary schools. Brossard, et.al (2021) reported that most of the families encountered economic difficulties which affects the enrolment rate. The uncertainty of online learning modalities about its effectiveness also affect parents delaying or opting out of enrolling their children in school.

Learning modalities such as the distance learning posed various challenges among elementary teachers. Dhawan (2020) posits that insufficient training on educational technologies, lack of engagement among students, online classroom management became a great challenge among teachers. These teachers struggled to adapt online learning modalities such as the use of online learning resources, limited access to internet and inadequate digital learning materials. These resource constraints will hinder the effective teaching and learning, leading to poor quality education.

Furthermore, Kuhfeld et al. (2020) found that while some students adapted well to online learning, many experienced learning losses, particularly in reading and mathematics. Factors such as home environment, parental support, and access to learning resources played crucial roles in determining students' academic success.

In terms of professional development, teachers were unprepared for the demands of remote teaching. The professional development focusing on the digital tools, online pedagogy and emotional resilience would help elementary teachers to navigate the new normal education (Trust and Wahlen (2020).

Since teachers are flexible enough to adapt to this shift of education, Pressley and Ha (2021) highlighted some strategies that the teachers may adopt to cope up with this new educational landscape. Such coping mechanisms include peer support and collaboration where teachers create support network and linkages to share their educational resources, emerging practices and emotional support during the new normal education. Also, the teachers may also engage in various professional development such as attending online courses, webinar sessions, and workshops that may help them enhance their digital skills, and adapt to the newest teaching strategies. Flexibility and innovation significantly play as one of the coping mechanisms of elementary teachers during the new normal education. Teachers can adopt blended learning modalities which include the synchronous and asynchronous session to cater the students' needs. In addition, teachers may also engage in emotional and mental support by accessing mental health resources and practicing self-care techniques to manage the stress and maintaining teachers' well-being.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study aimed to explore elementary teachers' experiences during the new normal education.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the issues and challenges encountered by the elementary teachers in the new normal education, in terms of:

- a. Enrolment;
  - b. Distance Learning Modality;
  - c. Resources;
  - d. Pupils' Academic Performance; and
  - e. Teachers' Professional Development
2. What are teachers' coping mechanisms in adapting to the new normal education?

### **Methods**

For this study, a qualitative phenomenological research design was utilized. Through this approach, the participants' unique experiences were explored and interpreted. To obtain their answers to the questions, in-depth interviews were conducted. Specifically focusing on the challenges public elementary teachers face in the Philippines under the "new normal" of education, the researcher conveniently selected nine participants with at least ten years of teaching experience from different schools in the Municipality of Bagumbayan District 1, a licensed professional teacher and teachers who can provide information based on knowledge and experience. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted remotely, and the questions were open-ended to allow for a thorough description of each participant's experience. The information gathered was meticulously recorded, transcribed, and verified to capture Filipino elementary school teachers' real-life encounters accurately. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the data, identifying recurring trends and patterns derived from the teachers' feedback (Jamon & Cabanes, 2019).

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **Enrolment**

The study came up with two common issues and challenges teachers and parents encountered in remote enrolment.

#### **No Communication**

DepEd used online messaging, texting, calling, and email as substitutes for physical reporting to schools to introduce remote enrollment. Unfortunately, not all parents are accessible through this communication during enrollment. Teachers need help communicating with parents having discrepancies in their pupil's data in the Learners Enrolment Survey Form,

and parents still need to submit the form, which is evident from their responses.

*Mahirap mag-enrol pag walang contact number and parents or guardians (it is difficult to enroll pupils if the parent guardians are without a contact number) to supplement the lacking data. (P4)*

*It will take time for teachers to rectify these errors since parents or guardians need their phone numbers to appear in the Learner Enrollment and Survey Form (LESF). (P1)*

*Struggling if the parents have no contact number or other means of communication in enrolling their kids (P3)*

After analyzing the feedback from participants, it is evident that they are encountering obstacles within the current education system. Parents need to communicate more effectively, and teachers find it challenging to receive prompt responses and update information from parents at home during remote enrollment. Furthermore, teachers are utilizing various communication methods, adding to the complexity. Consequently, finding ways to enroll inaccessible parents by visiting their homes is a significant challenge for educators.

### **Parent's Lack of Education**

The Learner Enrollment Survey Form (LESF) is a tool used to gather data on students' proficiency in various learning modes and to register students for the upcoming academic year. Subject to the health and safety regulations set by the IATF, schools may facilitate drop box enrollment by erecting booths and kiosks in front of the school, the barangay hall, and other prominent locations accessible to parents and guardians. This will streamline the process and guarantee the protection of the health and safety of our education stakeholders. Parents with a lack of education struggling to fill out the forms can delay the online submission of school enrollment reports, which is evident from their responses.

*Remote enrollment? Mabudlay!( Difficult!) Compare data, ang teacher manual lang sang pupils kag parents nga mag enroll sa school (previously, the teacher would only wait for pupils and parents to enroll in school). However, in the new normal, teachers do all his/ her means to reach the pupils and parents to enroll, especially those parents who did not submit their survey form because they do not know how to fill it out. (7)*

*Parents drop their LESF in the enrollment box even if the data are incomplete because they did not know how to answer the survey form. (P2)*

*Information supplied by some parents showed errors, especially for new pupils like transferees and kindergarten. (P1)*

During the COVID-19 epidemic, parent involvement is crucial to the government's education continuity program. Their role as facilitators of learning involves keeping an eye on their children's growth. Usually, they provide direction and support to their kids so they can understand the class's content. However, due to a lack of education, not all parents are able or willing to help their kids with their schoolwork.

### **Distance Learning Modality**

All Elementary schools of Bagumbayan District 1 preferably use Modular Distance learning where the school provides printed Self Learning Modules for every pupil. Teachers are the ones facilitating the reproduction of the printed modules. Teachers encountered challenges in producing printed modules, as stated in their responses.

#### **Theme: Insufficient time in printing modules**

*Makapoy! (stressful!) Trabahoso (workaholic)! It would help if you had time to reproduce their modules (P2)*

*Most of our time is spent in the reproduction of printed modules (P3)*

*Nakakapagod! (stressful!) We spend the printing schedule on a Xerox machine overnight in school to finish the target module to reproduce. (P5)*

*Delaying of modules distribution because of insufficient printing supply like a printer and Xerox machine. (P7)*

Based on the responses, teachers encountered challenges in spending all their time reproducing the printed modules. Teachers value their work greatly to prepare the students' learning materials. Teachers consequently put in extra hours of effort to meet all of these obligations. The late creation of modules is caused by students needing more time to prepare and print their modules. Moreover, the manufacturing of printed products is impacted by a need for more printing supplies and materials. As a result, instructors need more time to create and distribute every module for the entire quarter due to a shortage of time and enough printing supplies. (Acala & Castroverde, 2021)

### **Resources**

Theme: **Teachers shell out expenses from their pocket**

It is clear from their comments that in addition to paying for their personal and family requirements, instructors also have to pay extra out of pocket for the supplies they use in the classroom.

*Teachers must shell out some expenses to cater to the number of materials and learning resources. (P1)*

*We lack of school funding in the production and delivery of modules (P3)*

*Aside from the MOOE, as teacher, hindi maiwasan na hindi tayo gagastos lalo na pag kulang(it is inevitable that we will not spend especially when we are short supply of bondpaper and ink. We have to provide for all our learners' needs to augment the scarcity of school resources. Aside from that, even though there are no face-to-face classes, we also maintain and improve our classroom structure because there is still*

*evaluation and monitoring from our higher officials, so hindi maisawan this pandemic na hindi mangungutang ang mga teachers lalo kung kulang pa ang sweldo. (this pandemic is inevitable; teachers will only go into debt if their salaries are sufficient.) (P4)*

*Pag kulang ang budget at walang supply (When Insufficient budget and supply teachers supplemented from their own means (P5)*

The participants' response emphasizes that they depended on something other than the resources funded by the government. Currently, most public school educators are paying for school supplies out of their pockets without any expectation of reimbursement. A recent National Center for Education Statistics survey found that 94 percent of teachers spend money to ensure their classrooms have the necessary supplies and resources (Walker 2018, National Education Association (NEA) News). Even before the pandemic, public school teachers in our country have been recognized for their willingness to sacrifice financially to provide their students with a quality education, particularly those in remote areas. Today, some also incur additional expenses to print out learning modules (Rappler, 2020). Occasionally, teachers may request donations from other individuals for basic supplies like paper and ink.

### **Pupils' Academic Performance**

Theme: **Difficulty in Assessing Learners' Academic Performance**

Remote learning teachers need help to assess or evaluate pupils' performance since the learning is done at home. This challenge is reflected in the statement of the participants.

*Academic performance cannot be reliably measured since teachers cannot validate if the learners solely did tasks. Unlike the normal setting where teachers can supervise the examinations in the new set-exam papers are only handed out to learners. (P1)*

*It is very hard to get their academic performance because I do not know if it is the performance of a pupil (P2)*

*The academic performance of pupils not satisfying it is because some parents are the ones who answer the SLM of their children. (P7)*

*I cannot assure the learning development of pupils, especially those parents have lack education. How could they help their pupils answer the modules if they could not understand the details written in the modules? They are copying the answer in the answer key for compliance. Masho shock ka lang na ang modules for 1 month natapos ng bata sagutin sa loob lang ng isang lingo?(you will be shock that the modules for 1 month they were finished answer within a week?)(P8)*

According to participant feedback, evaluating learning poses a significant challenge because parents take learning materials home. As a result, schools cannot verify who completed the evaluation tools, relying instead on the honesty and integrity of both parents and students. While some parents may attempt to manipulate evaluation methods to secure higher scores for their children, others prioritize the qualities their children learn from lessons and activities over numerical grades. (Canonizado, 2021).

### **Teachers Professional Development**

#### **Theme: Teachers sustain professional development**

Personal growth is a top priority for teachers, which is why they take the initiative to establish professional development objectives. These goals serve as a guide to assess progress and encourage self-improvement. By setting professional development goals, one can overcome negative emotions and gain a sense of fulfillment in both their personal and professional life, as evidenced by the enthusiastic responses of educators.

*Online courses and webinars helped teachers to continue their professional development (P1)*

*The new set-up also allowed teachers to have extra-time and enroll in their master's classes. (P5)*

*This is a perfect time and opportunity for me to upgrade and update my professional development growth, knowing that there are no face-to-face classes so I can continue my schooling online. (P6)*

*We can attend seminars or webinars online hassle-free and costless to update ourselves in dealing with the new normal education (P8)*

*DepEd conducts webinars and online training to help teachers cope with the demands of new normal education. (P9)*

Salendab (2023) stressed that teachers must adapt their teaching methodologies to the new normal, as informed by student feedback. To support their efforts, the Department of Education (DepEd) hosts webinars on various topics to help teachers become more efficient in teaching during the pandemic. Teaching is a continuous learning process, so teachers must remain open to learning new things to help them grow. Effective teachers are flexible and able to modify their teaching methodologies to suit the needs of their students, the resources available, and the environment in which they are teaching. They prioritize their students' achievement over strict adherence to teaching practices.

### **Teachers' Coping Mechanisms in Adapting to the Challenges of the New Normal Education**

#### **Theme: Teachers' Positive Response to Adopt the Changes**

Having a positive outlook helps you deal with the difficulties of the new normal of education. A positive attitude, self-assurance from inspiration and support, a balanced lifestyle, and stress management enable people to carry out their obligations despite the difficulties of these difficult times. This attitude emphasizes the statements of the participants.

*Whole heartedly accepting and following the guidelines implemented by the department. Wala tayong magagawa as teacher ito yong sinumpaang tungkulin natin na tulungan at turuan ang mga bata sa abot ng ating makakaya. (P1)*

*Accept the changes positively. Teachers are flexible, and we are known for that. (P2)*

*Attending Webinars provided by the DepEd is one of the mechanisms that greatly helped teachers cope with the new learning modality. (P5)*

*Digital transformation in education was brought about by COVID-19, so as a teacher with little knowledge about this, I keep upgrading myself and learning what the technology brings us. In particular, all school reports are submitted online, and conferences and seminars are done online in flat form. (P7)*

The feedback from the participants highlights the significance of flexibility and adaptability in overcoming challenges and achieving goals. Furthermore, educators prioritizing a positive and supportive atmosphere can positively impact students' academic achievements and emotional growth, extending beyond the classroom setting (Loveless, 2020).

## Conclusion

Despite their challenges, teachers play an irreplaceable role in shaping the education landscape. Filipino educators are a testament to resilience and motivation, constantly adapting to changes in their profession for the betterment of their students' futures. Despite encountering obstacles that may impede their work, they persevere through the new normal and carry out their tasks with unwavering dedication. Thus, teachers must develop well-crafted and efficient teaching strategies tailored to meet their students' needs. It is essential to approach the current situation with a positive mindset, embrace the changes, and be willing to step outside one's comfort zone to explore new possibilities. It is also important for

school administrators to work together with teachers in order to overcome the challenges they face while adapting to new teaching practices. Teachers require proper resources and relevant training to stay current with new trends in education and deliver quality education effectively during these uncertain times.

## References

- Alferez, B. J. A. L., Siraji, A. D., Labaria, J. G. C., Yusop, R. J., Maglente, S., & Salendab, F. A. (2023). Examining Learner Independence in the Online Classroom for Improved Learning Outcomes. *Journal for ReAttach Therapy and Developmental Diversities*, 6(8s), 419-427.
- Brossard, M., Cardoso, M., Kamei, A., Mishra, S., Reuge, N., & Winthrop, R. (2021). COVID-19: Missing More Than a Classroom. The impact of school closures on children's nutrition. Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/covid-19-missing-more-than-a-classroom/>
- Canonizado (2021) Challenges that Teachers face under the New Normal System in Education. <https://discover.hubpages.com/education/Challenges-that-Teachers-Are-Facing-Under-the-New-Normal-System-in-Education>
- Castroverde, F. & Acala. (2021) Modular distance learning modality: Challenges of teachers in teaching amid the Covid-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 27 June 2021. ISSN: 2243-7703
- Daniel, S. J. (2020). Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects*, 49(1-2), 91-96. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3>
- Dhawan, S. (2020). Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(1), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239520934018>
- Jamon. et al. (2021) Teachers Lived Experiences In The New Normal In Philippine Public Schools: A Phenomenology, *International Journal of Research*, February 2021, p- ISSN: 2348-6848

- Kim, L. E., & Asbury, K. (2020). 'Like a rug had been pulled from under you': The impact of COVID-19 on teachers in England during the first six weeks of the UK lockdown. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(4), 1062-1083. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12381>
- Loveless, E. (2020). Strategies for Building a Productive and Positive Learning Environment. <https://www.educationcorner.com/building-a-positive-learning-environment.html>
- Pressley, T., & Ha, C. (2021). Teaching During a Pandemic: United States Teachers' Self-Efficacy During COVID-19. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 104, 103465. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103465>
- Salendab, F. A. (2021). School Heads' Administrative Supervision: Relating to the Program Accreditation of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Region XII. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)*, 12(13), 194-202.
- Salendab, F. A., & Dapitan, Y. C. (2021). Performance of Private Higher Education Institutions and the School Heads' Supervision in South Central Mindanao. *Psychology and Education*, 58(3), 3980-3997.
- Salendab, F. A., Ignacio Jr, A. G., Vidal, C. J., MAGLANTE, S. S., Jimenez, V. D., Soriano, S., & Capulso, L. B. (2024). Evaluating The Effects Of Zoom Video Conferencing On Student Education: Applying The Technology Acceptance Framework. *Migration Letters*, 21(S3), 902-917.
- Salendab, F., (2023). Proposed Instructional Scheme in the New Normal Education: Basis for Pedagogical Strategies/Practices. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(8), 712-719.
- Vicente, A., & Salendab, R. L. A. (2022). The Instructional Experiences on SKSU-Kalamansig Campus: The Case of Non-Teacher Education Graduates. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 4(1), 1-13.
- Walters, A. (2020). Inequities in access to education: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter*, 36(8), 8-8. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cbl.30483>
- Wang, G., Zhang, Y., Zhao, J., Zhang, J., & Jiang, F. (2020). Mitigate the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet*, 395(10228), pp. 945-947. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30547-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30547-X)