

Rural High School Teachers' Struggles and State of Well-being in the New Normal in Samar, Philippines

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Abstract: The struggles and state of well-being of rural high school teachers in the new normal were analyzed and themed based on Colaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method. Results found that teachers were aware of Covid-19 through watching Television and browsing social media. Thus, there is a feeling of fear and worry about their health and of their loved ones. In terms of their job, teachers were experiencing a problem because of poor internet connection. Strategies done were attending webinars, coordinating with village officials, making activity worksheets, and buying gadgets for online submission of reports. Also, teachers continue to observe proper health protocols and continue working for passion and salary needs. Still, there are indications of mental health regress by suffering from stress and confusion, especially for seasoned teachers who are not tech-savvy and who are adjusting to the new normal.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 or COVID-19 created a worldwide health crisis that has a significant impact on everyday living. Public health and social measures to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19 were implemented since COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating, virus is still spreading fast, and most people are still susceptible. It reached more than one hundred countries with over 100,000 cases during the first week of March (Bhagavathula et al., 2020).

The occurrence of the Covid-19 health crisis severely obstructed all aspects of life, including social, economic, cultural

and psychological (Settersten, 2020). Many countries have imposed travel restrictions, and place orders on their residents to stay at home (Azlan et al., 2020). Moreover, with the Coronavirus outbreak, massive lockdown has been implemented by governments in several countries including the Philippines (Prasetyo, 2020). The government implemented numerous actions including imposing community quarantines, expanding testing capacities and strengthening contact tracings, and provided government aids such as social amelioration to low-income families and displaced workers (WHO, 2020).

The spread of COVID-19 pandemic changes the way human lives. Since there is no cure or vaccine available for Covid-19 disease, everyone is adjusting to life under “new normal” (Asonye, 2020). People learn to cope and adjust to fit with the current environment (McLeod, 2018). Here, one of the most affected groups is the teaching profession.

COVID-19 has affected the public educational sectors in terms of adjustment in educational modalities of instructional delivery, school operations, and policies (Baloran & Hernan, 2020). This pandemic challenged the education system across the world and forced teachers to shift to an online mode of teaching (Dhawan, 2020). However, teachers assigned in rural areas face challenges with limited access to technology and online connectivity (Smith, 2020). There are also millions of students who are struggling as they lack necessary technology such as Internet connection and electronic gadgets. Thus, the inequalities that arise between the students who live in the urban area and those living in rural areas, and also between the rich and poor who cannot afford to access the internet will further increase the gap in continuing education with e-learning during the pandemic (Subedi, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought modifications to the teaching profession specifically to the teaching approaches and strategies employed by teachers. Face to face interaction was no longer allowed and modality has shifted to either online or modular learning or both. The teachers who were mostly affected were those who are not tech-savvy and do not have gadgets. Even when teachers are prepared, the students who are studying in rural schools are at the disadvantage of the implementation of

technology-based modality. Hence, this research was conceptualized.

2. Objectives

This study explored the experiences of rural high school teachers during the new normal. In examining the teachers’ experiences, the subsequent specific research objectives were sought:

1. Explore the rural high school teachers’ experiences and challenges encountered during the new normal.
2. Describe the adaptation strategies employed by rural high school teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. Assess the state of well-being of the teacher-participants during the pandemic.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the struggles and well-being of rural high school teachers during the new normal due to the pandemic. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that defines the meaning of a lived experience of a phenomenon for several persons. This research used in-depth interviews via phone and messenger.

Research Participants

Participants for this study who were purposive sampled consisted of rural high school teachers from a secondary school in the district of Samar. In the selection of participants, it is the researcher’s accountability to select participants or respondents who show specific experience

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant	Age (yrs)	Sex	Civil Status	Highest Attainment	Educational	No. of Years in Teaching	Designation/ Rank
T 1	23	M	Single	BSE Degree holder with Masteral Units		3	SST I
T 2	32	F	Married	Master's Degree holder		6	SST III
T 3	25	F	Single	BSE degree holder with Masteral Units		4	SST I
T 4	30	F	Married	Master's Degree Holder		6	SST III
T 5	48	F	Married	Master's Degree holder		4	SST III
T 6	53	M	Married	BSE degree holder with Masteral Units		28	SST III
T 7	52	F	Married	Education units holder with Masteral Units		19	SST III
T 8	47	M	Separated	BSE degree holder with Masteral units		19	SST III

of the phenomenon (Englander, 2012). In this study, ten teachers were interviewed, but saturation point was reached after eight participants (As shown in Table 1).

Saturation happens when the addition of more participants in the study does not result in additional perceptions and information. It is the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data.

Data Analyses

To gather and analyze data, one-on-one interviews via phone and messenger have been used to avoid physical contact and to observe social distancing. Analysis of data were patterned on Colaizzi's phenomenological descriptive method (Alzayani, 2015).

The researcher listened to all the recorded interview data in the smartphone many times before the transcription. This was done directly after the in-depth interview with the participants. Manual coding was employed to generate subthemes, which were clustered for the

final themes. All transcripts were re-read to check if the themes were explicitly expressed in the words of the participants.

Ethical Consideration

The researchers made a checklist of the selection criteria for the participants of this study: a) respondents or participants were required to be a rural high school teacher; b) they belong to a high school from Samar division, and; c) are willing to be interviewed in connection with the purpose of the study and signed a consent form. Manuscript proposal was presented and duly approved by the Ethics board of the university.

All participants received oral information via phone call and soft copy of information thru email/ messenger app of the objective of the study and the possibility of withdrawing their participation at any time without the need to give reasons for doing so. During the conduct of the interview, the participants were informed of recording their responses. Also, the recording was kept safely until they were

properly translated word for word. After which, the recording was deleted. The transcribed notes of the one-on-one interview did not contain any information that would allow individual to be linked to any statement. The participants were assured that the discussion would be confidential.

4. Results and Discussion

Teachers were aware that Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is an infectious disease. Coronavirus disease is transmitted by inhalation or contact with infected droplets (Singhal, 2020). The participants are also aware that once a person has contracted coronavirus, it can take 2–14 days for symptoms to appear. Symptoms of coronavirus can be mild and come on gradually. The primary symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, dry cough, and fatigue (Wang, 2020).

4.1 Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) is an infectious disease

The following utterances proved/supported Theme 1:

T1: “Covid-19 is a type of communicable disease that can easily transmit from one person to another person or from one thing to a person.”

T2: “Coronavirus is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person.”

T3, T5: “Covid-19 is a deadly virus that is transmitted through direct contact from the carrier.”

T4, T6, T7: “Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered corona virus.”

T8: “Covid came from China which had cost many lives after it spreads throughout.”

Preventive strategies to prevent spread of the virus include the isolation of

patients and careful infection control, including appropriate measures to be adopted during the diagnosis and the provision of clinical care to an infected patient. For instance, droplet, contact, and airborne precautions should be observed during specimen collection, and sputum induction should be avoided (Cascella, Rajnik, Cuomo, Dulebohn, & Di Napoli, 2020). Moreover, the most effective strategy is to frequently wash the hands and use portable hand sanitizer and avoid contact with their face and mouth after interacting with a possibly contaminated environment (Cascella, Rajnik, Cuomo, Dulebohn, & Di Napoli, 2020). Thus, the government should strengthen public awareness programs regarding Covid-19 causes, symptoms, effects, and preventive strategies, through the use of online platforms. In this manner, people will be aware of the proper preventive measures.

4.2 Television and social media are sources of information about Covid-19

T1, T6, T7: “I have got it from the news and articles mostly in the Television exposing the details, origin and its cause and effect.”

T2: “In television and social media.”

T3, T8: “I got information from social media like the official Facebook page of DOH, from some journalists and also from televisions.”

T4: “Getting information about Covid-19 disease usually in News TV from different channels and especially in social media.”

T5: “I have learned about it on TV and through my social media acct ... Facebook.”

Teachers acquired information about Covid-19 through watching Television and browsing social media account. According to Zou and Liu (2020), as awareness disseminates, people change their behaviors

to alter susceptibility. Thus, wide information dissemination and announcements can help peoples' awareness of the spread and control of the disease (Nicomedes et al., 2020). An awareness campaign to be aired on Television and posted on social media to help lessen the spread of the new coronavirus disease.

4.3 Initial Reactions of teachers from the Covid-19 pandemic

T1: "The moment I read the news about this virus it was very alarming, I am in fear, because even the health professionals weren't knowledgeable enough about the whole thing of this disease, not at all."

T5: "I am afraid of it since the virus can be transmitted from person to person."

T6, T7: "I am afraid because I belong to vulnerable group."

T2: "I was afraid because it kills people. I worry for the safety of my family."

T4: "My initial reaction about this pandemic was I am being worried about how it can affect my family and me."

T7: "I feel bored for always being at home, but I am afraid of being infected, especially my children and grandson."

T8: "I am anxious about my schooling."

The feeling of fear and worry were the initial reactions of teachers regarding Covid-19 disease. This disease incites panic because as a new virus, there is no vaccine yet. Scientists are still studying how it behaves and development of a vaccine must undergo series of clinical trials. Czeisler (2020) averred that the COVID-19 pandemic has been associated with mental health challenges and symptoms of anxiety disorder and there are increasing cases of depressive disorder. Health institutions should provide help and assistance for those having anxiety towards the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.4 Teachers face problems / challenges with a poor internet connection and weak signals during the new normal

T1: "We cannot deny the fact that we have a very slow internet compare to our neighboring countries, so basically reaching out to my learners is one of those (challenges), most especially my station has no signal and internet connections, and the majority of them do not have any means of communication like cellphones and other gadgets".

T2, T8: "I had a problem about submitting my papers because it uses a strong internet connection."

T3: "The problems are the absence of signal and internet in my workplace. I consider it as a major problem because almost everybody depends on social media in disseminating information to their students. We cannot do that in our case since our students do not have access to such things." T4, T6: "The challenge/ problem I have encountered is a weak signal in our teaching area."

The poor internet connection and weak signals were the main problems and challenges faced by teachers during the new normal. As the pandemic caused by the coronavirus has spread worldwide, people have been isolating themselves to reduce the spread of infection yet they continue working through work from home schemes which effectively shields workers from short-term work, COVID-19 distress and infection risks (Alipour, 2020). Moreover, it has drastically disrupted every aspects of human life including education since campuses are closed and teaching-learning has moved online (Jena, 2020). Omar (2020) stated that in managing the situation and continuing with teaching and learning, instructions have been conducted

online using synchronous and asynchronous tools. Thus, it is recommended that the government or the concerned authority should provide a better action plan on how to deal with unexpected occurrences.

4.5 Adaptation strategies are being employed by teachers to cope with the new normal

T1: "I have joined webinar sessions by Vibal group to continue learning despite the pandemic happening."

T5: "I also attended webinar sessions."

Teachers were attending the seminar through online access (webinar) for continuous learning. A webinar or web-seminar is a presentation, seminar, lecture, or workshop transmitted over the internet (Zoumenou, 2015). It allows continuing learning through flexible learning modality, educational technology, and using different online platforms for continuous learning that are very much helpful to the teachers.

T1: "As per instructions to us by our School Head, we decided to make a box and produce more enrollment form then send to the different barangays for them to enroll for this school year easily."

T2: "With regards to the enrollment process for the school year 2020-2021, we coordinated with local barangay officials to help us disseminate information regarding the enrollment and also help us to provide enrollment forms to the students."

Teachers and barangay officials coordinate with one another in helping the learners enroll this coming school year. Ainscow and Hargreaves (2016) emphasized that education systems have further potential to improve themselves through strengthening collaboration within schools, between schools and beyond schools. Thus,

schools and local government units should continue to coordinate with one another to reach out to those students and their parents. In this way, parents will know the latest information about the new school rules and procedures, and students will be able to access education.

T3: "when it comes to my work, I am making enhanced worksheets for my students."

T4: "For my work preparation, I have made activity worksheets for the subject I handled so that it will not be difficult to teach for a flexible approach in teaching."

T8: "I just keep myself busy in making activity sheets so I will not be bored at home."

Teachers are making activity worksheets for the modular approach in the teaching-learning process. Lee (2014) highlighted that worksheets could be used by teachers to assess students' previous knowledge, and the teaching and learning process and outcomes. Moreover, students' progress can be monitored amid the absence of a face to face interaction. Training on how to properly create activity worksheets aligned to the essential objectives can help address the problems faced by the teachers.

T2: "I had to accept the situation and provide a WiFi in order for me to pass the papers needed in the office or our school."

T5: "I have bought new android phone to access online reports for submission easily."

T6, T7: "I asked my children to teach me in using the gadgets."

Teachers use their own money to buy gadgets that are useful for online submission of reports, and teaching through blended learning which has shown to be an effective approach for accommodating diverse students and enriching the learning

environment by incorporating online teaching resources (Serrano, 2019). Thus, educational agencies must provide help to teachers and educators in terms of the provision of things they need for online teaching.

T3: “And as for my daily living, I am now considering washing wands and disinfecting stuff as a routine.”

T4: “The approaches/innovations I have applied in order to adapt to this new normal kind of living due to Covid-19 pandemic is for having self-preservation, safety precautions and utilizing some disinfectants materials to circumvent being infected with this virus pandemic”.

T8: “I always observe safety protocol when I leave my house by always putting on a mask and always bringing alcohol.”

Teachers observed proper use of masks, washing hands and disinfecting to avoid infection with the disease. Since there is no vaccine to prevent coronavirus disease 2019, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. Hence, teachers should be provided with an online seminar discussing the different preventive measures to avoid the contamination of the virus. Also, teachers must be provided with materials such as alcohol and mask to lessen the spread of the virus.

4.6 State of the well-being of teachers in the new normal

The state of the well-being of a person is a primary concern of the government. During the first months of lockdowns and quarantine declaration, teachers struggled to comply with deadlines and deliverables in a not familiar and difficult situation. Most teachers are used to face-to-face and traditional mode of work, and now they are shifting to online and

computerized submission of reports. The situation is compounded with seasoned teachers who are not skilled in using computers and other gadgets. Moreover, the anxiety brought by COVID 19 is affecting the motherly nature of teachers who prefer face to face rather than remote learning. This finding is supported by Patrick et al. (2020) who reported that mental health of parents had worsened alongside children’s behavioral health for children in nearly 1 in 10 families during the pandemic.

T2: “I had a problem with submitting my report because of intermittent internet connectivity. Many times I have hated the system and the COVID but what will I do? I wish the government can also assist to teachers.”

T4: “I am adjusting. If I am allowed to retire by now, I would readily do so. This computer work stressed me a lot.”

T5: “I am not ok to be honest. Even though I am still receiving a salary and I have some savings due to lesser travels, but the anxiety and online works are bugging me. Plus, the worry for my pupils, my children and for their schooling. I wish we can go back to normal.”

T7, T8: “ I always feel anxious but I just pray to God and trust His protection.”

Also, a significant increase in the workload during the shift to online learning system had caused individual time management challenges (Giovannella, et al., 2020). On the other hand, young teachers found to be at ease with the use of their gadgets but still frustrated with the current internet connectivity. A need to conduct mental health awareness seminar for all educators is a timely intervention to address the teachers’ positive well-being.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought changes to the lives of everyone. There is a need to address the issues and challenges encountered by the teachers during the new normal due to Covid-19. Teachers were aware that Covid-19 is an infectious disease in which information was derived through watching Television and browsing social media account. The feeling of fear and worry were the initial reactions of teachers regarding Covid-19 disease.

As to work challenges, poor internet connection and weak signals were the main problems and challenges faced by teachers during the new normal. In order to adapt to the situation, teachers were attending seminars through online access (webinar) for continuous learning, coordinate with the local government officials in helping the learners enroll this coming school year, making activity worksheets for the modular approach in teaching-learning process.

Furthermore, teachers use their own money to buy gadgets that are useful for online submission of reports. As to their well-being, most seasoned teachers were affected by the shift to the online system, and the fear and anxiety had troubled them. This paper explored several issues and challenges encountered by the rural high school teachers during the new normal due to Covid-19 which must be addressed by the concerned agencies.

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