



Unveiling the experience of teachers in educational parlance: The post pandemic era of Covid-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted global education, compelling educators to rapidly adapt to remote learning environments. This study examines the experiences of higher education teachers in the Cagayan Valley, Philippines, during this unprecedented shift. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, ten educators were interviewed to explore the personal and professional challenges they faced, including technological difficulties, mental health concerns, and student engagement issues. Findings reveal that while the abrupt transition posed substantial obstacles—such as adapting teaching methodologies and ensuring assessment integrity—educators also demonstrated resilience and innovation. Coping mechanisms ranged from the adoption of blended learning strategies to increased collaboration among peers. The study highlights the critical need for educational institutions to develop frameworks for crisis management, ensuring better preparedness for future disruptions. This research informs effective strategies that can enhance the educational landscape in times of crisis, ultimately promoting a more adaptable and resilient educational system.

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Introduction

The emergence of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in late 2019 brought unprecedented changes to all aspects of human life. The rapid transmission of the virus forced societies worldwide to alter their daily routines and interactions drastically. Activities once considered routine were abruptly curtailed as the virus spread, compelling people to exercise extreme caution in public spaces.

Face masks, face shields, and alcohol became everyday essentials, and paranoia around social interactions grew as the health risks became more evident.

The fear surrounding COVID-19 was amplified by the alarming rise in cases, the increasing number of deaths, and the overwhelming strain on healthcare systems worldwide. Vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, children, pregnant women, and those with pre-existing health conditions, were particularly at risk, making the

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pandemic a source of widespread anxiety. COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, China, in late 2019 (Adil et al., 2021), and its rapid transmission forced countries to close their borders and enforce stringent health protocols to safeguard public health.

News reports and social media platforms flooded people with images and stories of the virus's deadly impact, particularly its effect on the respiratory system. Although extensive research has been conducted to trace the origins of the virus and explore ways to boost immunity, a definitive explanation of its origin remains elusive. Vaccines were developed to combat the virus and its variants, but the threat persists, prompting governments and health experts to emphasize preventive measures and social distancing.

The pandemic's impact extended far beyond health, permeating various aspects of society, including education. In an effort to limit social contact and mitigate the spread of the virus, governments worldwide imposed lockdowns, prompting educational institutions to close their doors. The sudden transition to remote learning posed significant challenges for both teachers and students. Educators had to quickly adapt to new modes of instruction, often sacrificing the quality of education as traditional pedagogies gave way to online platforms. The psychological toll of these changes was profound, with many teachers reporting mental health struggles linked to the stress of transitioning to remote teaching (Santiago et al., 2023). This disruption led to a dramatic shift in the education sector, where learning and teaching were reshaped by the demands of a global crisis (Lizana et al., 2021).

For teachers in higher education, the pandemic presented a unique set of challenges. They were not only tasked with navigating new teaching modalities but were also deeply concerned about the well-being of their students. Student welfare, always a priority, became even more critical as the pandemic demanded resilience and adaptability in the face of an ever-changing educational landscape. This crisis underscored the importance of flexibility in higher education, pushing institutions and educators alike to innovate and adapt to the new normal (Sobral et al., 2021).

In the Cagayan Valley region of the Philippines, the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on educational institutions. When the government mandated the closure of schools and universities, the region responded swiftly, though the transition was not without difficulties. With the pandemic striking in the middle of the academic year, schools and universities were left scrambling to adjust, relying on preliminary assessments

to evaluate students' academic performance. At that time, the primary concern was not grades or instructional quality but ensuring the safety of students and faculty amid an unfolding global health crisis.

As the pandemic persisted, it became clear that educational institutions needed to find long-term solutions to continue delivering quality education. Higher education institutions in the Philippines, like many around the world, embraced remote learning, recognizing the lasting impact of the pandemic on the education system. This shift to virtual classrooms highlighted the necessity of investing in technology and infrastructure that could support online learning during crises, ensuring continuity in education despite external disruptions.

This study aims to explore the recovery mechanisms adopted by higher education teachers during the pandemic. By examining their experiences and coping strategies, the study seeks to develop a framework for crisis management that can serve as a guide for educational institutions in future emergencies. Understanding how teachers navigated the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial in crafting effective responses to similar unprecedented events in the future.

Research Questions

1. How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact educators' professional and personal lives?
2. What challenges did educators face while adapting to the sudden shift in teaching modalities during the pandemic?
3. What specific problems arose for educators regarding technology, mental health, and student engagement in the new learning environment?
4. What coping mechanisms and strategies did educators develop to navigate the difficulties presented by the pandemic?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological research design, which is widely used in qualitative research to explore and describe the lived experiences of individuals in specific contexts (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology allows researchers to delve into the subjective experiences of participants, focusing on how they interpret and make sense of a particular phenomenon (Vagle, 2018). In this case, the study explored the experiences of teachers

during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically how the pandemic affected their professional and personal lives. A descriptive approach was integrated within the phenomenological design to capture the details of these experiences and the impact of the pandemic on the educational system in the Philippines. This design was deemed appropriate as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, going beyond surface-level observations to uncover deeper insights (Deocadez & Gayoles, 2022). The study was conducted in Region II, Philippines, from January 2022 to November 2023, ensuring that the participants' experiences were collected in a relevant temporal and geographical context.

Population and Sampling

The research utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique often employed in qualitative research to select participants who have firsthand experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method allowed the researcher to intentionally choose teachers who could provide rich, detailed insights into their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The eligibility criteria included: (1) teachers from higher education and vocational institutions, (2) fluency in Filipino, English, or their local dialect, and (3) a willingness to participate in the study. The sample size was determined by data saturation, a concept used in qualitative research to indicate the point at which no new information or themes are emerging from the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This study reached data saturation after interviewing 10 participants. However, if additional insights were needed, the researcher was prepared to continue interviews until the data fully captured the essence of the teachers' experiences. Saturation is crucial in phenomenological research, ensuring that the collected data are comprehensive and reflective of the diversity of the participants' experiences (Guest et al., 2020).

Research instrument

The primary tool for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide, which is commonly used in qualitative research to balance structure with flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask predetermined questions while also probing further into participants' responses, facilitating a deeper exploration of their experiences. The interview questions were designed to elicit open-ended responses about the teachers' perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their teaching practice.

Key questions included: "How would you describe COVID-19?" and "How has the pandemic changed your life as a teacher?" These broad questions were supplemented by more probing inquiries such as "What challenges did you face during the pandemic?" and "How did you cope with the transition to remote teaching?" Probing questions help to uncover detailed and nuanced information that participants may not immediately volunteer (Adebayo et al., 2023). This method ensured that the data collected were rich and contextually relevant.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews, which are a primary means of collecting qualitative data and allow for direct interaction between the researcher and participants Sula and Hoxha, (2025). To ensure accuracy in capturing participants' responses, interviews were audio-recorded, with participants' consent, for later transcription and analysis. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interview, as required by ethical research standards (Bhandari, 2021). Participants were made fully aware of the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any point. Ensuring participants' privacy and confidentiality is critical in qualitative research, as it fosters trust and encourages more honest and open responses (Orb et al., 2001). The researcher took measures to protect participants' identities by anonymizing their responses and ensuring that all data were securely stored. Additionally, the interviews were conducted in settings convenient for the participants, respecting both their time and comfort. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, providing sufficient time to explore the participants' experiences without causing undue fatigue.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using the Modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data, as outlined by Moustakas (1994). This method is widely used in phenomenological research to systematically analyze and interpret participants' lived experiences. The analysis began with the transcription of each interview, followed by a detailed review of the transcripts to identify significant statements that captured the essence of the participants' experiences. These statements, known as meaning units, were then grouped into thematic clusters, which reflected shared patterns across the participants' experiences. Imaginative

variation was employed to explore the underlying structures of these experiences, allowing the researcher to move beyond surface-level descriptions to uncover deeper meanings. The final step involved synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions into a comprehensive account of the participants' experiences, ensuring that the analysis was both rigorous and reflective of the complexities of the phenomenon (Deocadez & Gayoles, 2022; Lim, 2025).

Results and Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected all aspects of society, including education, forcing educators, students, and institutions to adapt swiftly to an entirely new learning environment. The following section presents the results derived from interviews conducted with teacher participants, exploring their experiences, perspectives, and the challenges they encountered during the pandemic. The findings are organized into four major themes, each accompanied by subthemes that represent specific elements of the participants' experiences: (1) Knowledge about the Covid-19 Pandemic, (2) Challenges Faced on the Situation, (3) Problems Brought by the Pandemic, and (4) Coping Mechanisms.

Knowledge About the Covid-19 Pandemic

This theme explores the participants' understanding of the pandemic and their perspectives on its impact on their professional and personal lives. The participants shared diverse perspectives on how the Covid-19 pandemic affected their daily lives and work as educators. Many acknowledged that it was a historical moment that disrupted routines and imposed social restrictions. This disruption also extended to education, where the immediate shift from face-to-face to online learning was both overwhelming and challenging.

One participant, R01, described the pandemic as both a challenge and an opportunity:

"It's a challenge because there was an abrupt change in the educational landscape... but also an opportunity for us to innovate and deliver things despite distance learning."

Another participant, R02, shared the difficulty of starting a teaching career in the middle of the pandemic:

"It was a real challenge because I was a fresh graduate at the time."

Some participants highlighted positive outcomes, such as the acceleration of technological advancement and communication tools (R05):

"Technology has expedited, making communication easier, even for those in far-flung areas."

These insights reflect a common theme of uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic, followed by a gradual acceptance of the new normal and recognition of the necessity to innovate in the face of adversity.

Challenges Faced During the Pandemic

Participants discussed the unprecedented challenges they encountered as educators during the pandemic, specifically regarding the shifts in the educational system and pedagogy.

2.1. Changes in the Educational System

The sudden shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online and blended learning required educators to adapt rapidly. Many teachers struggled with the abrupt changes, especially in terms of technology integration, assessment methods, and student engagement.

R01 emphasized the difficulty of adapting teaching and assessment practices to an online setting:

"The assessment is very challenging... we need to devise ways to ensure students are truly learning. We're not always sure if the students are doing the work themselves or if they're copying answers."

Other participants shared similar struggles in finding effective teaching strategies in the early days of online learning. R02 noted:

"I spent the first few months experimenting with different delivery methods. By the end of the semester, I realized students were more engaged when involved in hands-on activities, even online."

Despite these challenges, educators exhibited resilience by continuing to explore various pedagogical approaches. Adopting blended learning became a widespread strategy to address the need for flexibility in teaching.

2.2. Readiness of Students to Return to Face-to-Face Classes

A significant concern raised by participants was the readiness of students to return to face-to-face learning after months of online education. Many teachers observed that students faced difficulties in adjusting to the new realities of physical classrooms, especially with the financial burdens associated with commuting, boarding, and purchasing necessary learning tools.

R03 explained the increased financial strain on students:

“Students now need to spend on gadgets, fare, and boarding houses, which weren’t concerns during online learning.”

R05 noted that leniency during the pandemic might have impacted the reliability of grades:

“During the pandemic, we couldn’t give failing grades... this leniency affected the reliability of assessments during that time.”

These responses illustrate the complexities of transitioning back to traditional learning environments, as both teachers and students had to adjust to the new expectations and challenges posed by the post-pandemic scenario.

Problems Brought by the Pandemic

This theme focuses on the factors that challenged the participants in delivering their role as educators, particularly in terms of technology and the readiness of both teachers and students.

3.1. Technological Gaps and Challenges

The pandemic revealed stark inequalities in access to technology, with many students lacking the necessary devices and reliable internet connections to participate fully in online learning. These technological challenges greatly affected the delivery of lessons and the ability to engage students effectively.

According to R02:

“There was no best modality at first. I had to experiment with different strategies because the technological gap among students was a huge issue.”

Participants also noted that many teachers, especially older ones, struggled with integrating technology into their pedagogy. While younger teachers may have been more tech-savvy, they still faced challenges in navigating the intricacies of online platforms for educational purposes.

3.2. Emotional and Mental Strain

The abrupt shift in the education system also led to emotional and mental strain for both teachers and students. The constant uncertainty and the pressure to deliver quality education under challenging circumstances took a toll on the mental health of many educators.

R01 shared:

“The abrupt change was difficult for teachers. We had to blend our knowledge of teaching with technology, and not everyone was ready for that.”

These findings highlight the need for additional support, both technological and emotional, to help educators cope with the pressures brought about by the pandemic.

Coping Mechanisms

Despite the numerous challenges, the participants also demonstrated remarkable resilience by developing coping strategies to adapt to the new normal.

4.1. Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic

Participants frequently mentioned resilience as a key coping mechanism. Training and support from educational institutions helped teachers adjust to the demands of online learning. One participant, R05, mentioned:

“There were a lot of training programs available on learning management systems, and thanks to online platforms, we were still able to meet our students.”

The shift to online learning taught educators to be dynamic and responsive to changes. R06 expressed how adaptability became an advantage:

“The use of online classes allowed me to be adaptable. While some found it difficult, I saw it as an opportunity for convenience.”

This adaptability reflects the broader theme of resilience, where educators found ways to persevere despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic.

4.2. Adaptability and Flexibility

The final subtheme emphasizes the importance of adaptability and flexibility in overcoming the challenges of the pandemic. The responses from the participants underscore the necessity of being open to change, learning new skills, and maintaining a positive mindset throughout the crisis.

R06 shared:

“One challenge we continue to face is the need to adapt to new situations, but having a positive mindset helped me cope.”

R01 also emphasized the importance of continuous learning for teachers, especially in terms of integrating technology into their teaching:

“For new teachers, it’s essential to keep learning and blending technology with traditional teaching methods. For older teachers, retooling and learning new technology is necessary.”

These insights highlight that the pandemic, while difficult, also served as a learning experience, fostering flexibility and growth in both personal and professional contexts.

The results of this study illustrate how the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically altered the educational landscape. Educators were forced to navigate unprecedented challenges, including adapting to new teaching modalities, addressing technological gaps, and

supporting students through the transition to and from online learning. However, the findings also reveal the remarkable resilience and adaptability of teachers in the face of adversity. The pandemic provided opportunities for innovation in pedagogy and highlighted the critical need for flexibility in the education system. Ultimately, the experiences shared by the participants underscored the importance of preparedness, technological competence,

and emotional resilience in overcoming future challenges in education.

Table 1 presents the thematic analysis of participants' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. The themes were derived from in-depth analysis of participants' narratives capturing their lived experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms throughout the pandemic period.

Table 1 Thematic analysis of participants' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Example Statements
1. Knowledge About the Covid-19 Pandemic	1.1. Perspective on the Covid-19 Pandemic	Participants shared diverse perspectives on how the pandemic disrupted routines and imposed social restrictions, emphasizing the historical significance of the event.	"It's a challenge because there was an abrupt change in the educational landscape... but also an opportunity for us to innovate and deliver things despite distance learning." (R01) "It was a real challenge because I was a fresh graduate at the time." (R02)
	1.2. Positive Technological Advancements	Participants noted the pandemic accelerated the adoption of technology in education, improving communication.	"Technology has expedited, making communication easier, even for those in far-flung areas." (R05)
2. Challenges Faced During the Pandemic	2.1. Changes in the Educational System	The shift from traditional face-to-face teaching to online learning required rapid adaptation by educators.	"The assessment is very challenging... we need to devise ways to ensure students are truly learning. We're not always sure if the students are doing the work themselves or if they're copying answers." (R01) "I spent the first few months experimenting with different delivery methods." (R02)
	2.2. Readiness of Students to Return to Face-to-Face Classes	Concerns about students' readiness to return to physical classrooms, exacerbated by financial burdens and leniency during online learning.	"Students now need to spend on gadgets, fare, and boarding houses, which weren't concerns during online learning." (R03) "During the pandemic, we couldn't give failing grades... this leniency affected the reliability of assessments during that time." (R05)
3. Problems Brought by the Pandemic	3.1. Technological Gaps and Challenges	Inequalities in access to technology hindered effective participation in online learning for students and teachers.	"There was no best modality at first. I had to experiment with different strategies because the technological gap among students was a huge issue." (R02)
	3.2. Emotional and Mental Strain	The abrupt changes led to emotional and mental strain for educators, affecting their ability to deliver quality education.	"The abrupt change was difficult for teachers. We had to blend our knowledge of teaching with technology, and not everyone was ready for that." (R01)
4. Coping Mechanisms	4.1. Resiliency Amidst the Pandemic	Resilience emerged as a key coping mechanism, supported by training and institutional assistance for educators.	"There were a lot of training programs available on learning management systems, and thanks to online platforms, we were still able to meet our students." (R05)
	4.2. Adaptability and Flexibility	Adaptability became crucial for educators to navigate challenges, emphasizing the importance of a positive mindset.	"The use of online classes allowed me to be adaptable. While some found it difficult, I saw it as an opportunity for convenience." (R06) "One challenge we continue to face is the need to adapt to new situations, but having a positive mindset helped me cope." (R06)
	4.3. Continuous Learning and Innovation	The pandemic highlighted the necessity of continuous learning and blending technology with traditional teaching methods.	"For new teachers, it's essential to keep learning and blending technology with traditional teaching methods. For older teachers, retooling and learning new technology is necessary." (R01)

The thematic analysis of educators' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic reveals critical insights that extend beyond individual challenges and triumphs. The theme of knowledge about the pandemic emphasizes the duality of crisis and opportunity that many educators experienced. This aligns with the concept of "adaptive leadership," which emphasizes the ability of individuals and organizations to navigate uncertainty and foster innovation (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Educators recognized the need for a paradigm shift, moving away from traditional methods toward more innovative practices that could enhance student learning in a remote environment. The notion that crises can catalyze change is supported by Fullan (2020), who asserts that the pandemic served as a wake-up call, pushing educators to reevaluate their pedagogical approaches. As educational systems begin to recover and adapt, policymakers need to leverage this newfound knowledge, investing in training programs that promote flexible teaching methodologies that combine face-to-face and online learning. Future research could investigate the long-term impacts of these adaptive practices on student outcomes, particularly in diverse educational settings.

The theme regarding the challenges faced during the pandemic highlights systemic issues that have long been present in education but were exacerbated by the crisis. The sudden transition to online learning exposed significant inequities in access to technology, a finding echoed by Amirova et al. (2023) and Laufer et al. (2021), who noted that the digital divide has profound implications for educational equity. This awareness calls for immediate action from educational policymakers to ensure that all students have access to the necessary resources for online learning. Policies that promote technology equity, such as subsidizing internet access and providing devices for underserved populations, are crucial in mitigating these disparities. Moreover, as Koris, R., & Pál, Á. (2021) point out, the need for reliable assessment practices during times of crisis is paramount. Therefore, future research should explore the effectiveness of various assessment strategies in remote learning environments and how they can be adapted to ensure fairness and validity in evaluating student performance.

The emotional challenges that emerged during the pandemic signify the importance of addressing mental health and well-being in education. Agyapong et al. (2022) documented increased levels of stress among educators, emphasizing the need for comprehensive mental health support systems within schools. Educational leaders and policymakers must prioritize the integration of mental health resources into the curriculum and staff training. Additionally, the recognition that emotional

support plays a vital role in educator effectiveness should inform future policy developments, ensuring that mental health resources are not merely reactive but proactively embedded within educational institutions. Research should further explore the long-term effects of the pandemic on educators' mental health and the efficacy of various support programs in promoting well-being.

The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by educators during the pandemic highlight the necessity for ongoing professional development that fosters these skills. As noted by Hwang et al. (2021), educators who engaged in training programs reported feeling more equipped to handle the demands of online teaching. This suggests that continuous professional development should be a fundamental aspect of educational practice moving forward. Policymakers should consider creating structured pathways for professional growth that incorporate both technological training and pedagogical strategies, ensuring educators are prepared for future disruptions. Moreover, the adaptability shown by educators could serve as a valuable model for students, promoting a culture of resilience that extends beyond the classroom. Future research could examine the effectiveness of resilience training programs for both educators and students, assessing their impact on academic performance and overall well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound and lasting impact on educational institutions, particularly in Region II, Philippines. The sudden shift from routine operations to restrictive protocols and eventually to the new normal forced educators to rethink their approaches to teaching. This study explored the lived experiences of teachers in higher education during the pandemic and illuminated the challenges and opportunities they encountered. Teachers described the pandemic as a period of immense difficulty, characterized by new problems and disruptions to the educational system. However, these adversities also catalyzed innovation, pushing educators to adopt new teaching methods and embrace technology in ways they had not previously considered. The study revealed that, despite the overwhelming challenges, teachers were able to demonstrate resilience by continuing their work and adapting to changing circumstances. Furthermore, it highlighted the important role of flexibility and adaptability in education, emphasizing the need for diverse pedagogical strategies to meet the varied needs of students. As observed, many students also struggled with financial issues but were eager to return to

face-to-face learning, valuing the in-person interaction with their teachers. Ultimately, the pandemic reinforced the necessity of resilience, innovation, and adaptability in both teaching and learning environments.

In light of the findings, several recommendations can be made to improve future educational practices. First, teachers should continue to develop flexibility and adaptability, as the future of education will likely involve further disruptions and rapid changes. Professional development programs that focus on crisis preparedness and innovative teaching strategies will be crucial to maintaining effective education. Second, higher education institutions must invest in technological facilities to ensure that digital tools and platforms are available for blended learning. Reliable internet access, comprehensive learning management systems, and sufficient training for teachers in these technologies are essential to maintaining continuity in education. Third, institutions should revise curricula to incorporate life skills training, helping students develop critical thinking, adaptability, and resilience in the face of future crises. Finally, schools should enhance their support systems for students, particularly in areas like financial aid and mental health services, to ensure that students can fully engage with their education despite external challenges. By adopting these measures, the education sector can be better equipped to navigate future uncertainties and continue to provide high-quality learning experiences for students.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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