

# CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS TEACHING IN REMOTE AREAS IN THE NEW NORMAL

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**Abstract:** This qualitative-phenomenological research design study looked into the challenges faced by the teachers assigned in delivering the modular instruction in the remote schools of Maitum, Sarangani during the global pandemic. Using thematic analysis and codes that emerged from the transcribed data were the challenges of academically deficient parents, fear of one's health, poverty, the challenge of disinterested parents, the challenge of no face-to-face classes, the challenges of self-reproduction of the modules, and the adherence to health protocols. Despite the challenges, teacher participants described the challenges as stressful, yet, they still have full commitment to their work as a teacher. These were the themes that sprouted out from the codes. Hence, it is recommended that teachers may be recognized for their efforts to boost their morale. Also, efforts towards improving the socio-economic status of residents in far flung schools should be intensified. Further, teachers should be given enough remuneration for their efforts in continuing education in the new normal. Lastly, accessibility and availability of resources must be at the teacher's disposal.

**Keywords:** educational management, challenges, experiences, master teacher, remote areas, new normal, phenomenology, Philippines.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

"The Filipino rights to have equal access to premium education, by all means, is the primary concern of the country." This mandate from the Constitution is the driving force why Philippine education has pushed the delivery of K-12 education even in the country's most far-flung areas despite the world health emergency. When the corona outbreak started in the first quarter of 2020, the pandemic has changed the overall scheme of delivering instructions among the learners, especially in the areas where communications and transportation are usually unavailable. Numerous restrictions were set in all areas of the country, which led to the paralysis of delivering instructional services to the learners. Teachers tend to make the extra care, effort and spend lots of resources just to reach the learners in remote areas. They are even more obliged to perform their respective tasks amidst the danger brought by the virus (Dewi, 2020; Al Thaqafi, 2020). Additionally, considering the feasible danger and hardships faced by those teachers, this research endeavor aims to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the challenges experienced by those who deliver fundamental education in remote areas. The result of this study is expected to call the immediate attention of the educational leaders for possible allocation of additional resources, specialized protection programs, and other supplemental support programs that will capacitate, secure and empower the teachers to become more productive and effective in their profession (Herliandry, Nurhasanah, Suban & Kuswanto 2020). In the local setting, delivering quality basic education in remote areas has continuously created challenges for educators, especially now that the country is still on its battle against the pandemic. Furthermore, the content analysis study revealed the following categories of remote learning difficulties: unstable internet connectivity; insufficient learning resources; power outages; ambiguous learning contents; overloaded lesson activities; limited teacher scaffolds; poor peer communication; conflict with home responsibilities; poor learning environment; financial problems;

physical health compromises; and mental health struggles (Rotas & Cahapay, 2020; Singer, Nielsen & Schweingruber.). On the other hand, since Maitum, Sarangani is situated along coastlines and blessed with mountainous landscapes, remote schools are distributed on top of the mountains, isolated villages, and islets where many learners are hungry for education. The delivery of instructional materials to those areas in this new normal is quite effortful and risky. Maitum teachers have been considering these sacrifices and endeavors as part of their vocation as educators. The challenges were tough and unpredictable, the constant struggles are real, yet the commitment to the profession is still in the heart. Thus, embracing distance education during this pandemic is always coupled with new challenges for the teachers. Hence, the researcher wanted to investigate these challenges to develop sound inferences that may boost and motivate them while performing the tasks in distant schools. Though previous studies were already conducted related to the difficulties experienced by teachers who are teaching in remote areas, there has been no research that focused on the challenges experienced by the teachers in delivering the new mode of instructions to the area during the pandemic. Thus, this study proposes to fill that gap. It stated that the conditions of far-flung schools require passionate, brave, committed teachers to provide the much-needed services. Border lockdowns, physical distancing orders, prohibitions on larger gatherings, insufficient funds to cover module printing expenses, lack of internet connections, phone signals, and no available transportation to transport learning materials to assigned remote areas are just some of the common complaints raised by teachers during this pandemic. These deficiency problems brought extra challenges for teachers as to how well they manage the delivery of classes amidst the global health crisis. Also, the teachers' physical exposure in the field has brought imminent danger to their health. Thus, this study will address the problem. This study was conducted to investigate the teachers' challenges in delivering modular instruction in the remote schools in Maitum, Sarangani, during the global pandemic. It sought to determine what needs to be done by the government for those assigned teachers in the far-flung schools and address the gap to improve the holistic education services. How do the participants describe the challenges they have experienced in teaching in remote areas during the new normal?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study, particularly the rationale for qualitative approach, sample, and size, the role of the researcher, the research participants, the manner of obtaining access and permissions, the data gathering strategies, data analysis approach, ethical considerations, and validation methods

Phenomenology is a branch of science that bridges the gap between describing and understanding a phenomenon. It explores the details of the experiences of a particular group of individuals. Its primary goal is to gain access to the individual's consciousness and understand what this consciousness can disclose about the experiences it has witnessed. As a result, phenomenology is both a science of phenomena and a means for delving into a person's experiences regarding how they have lived, experienced, and made meaning (Guerrero-Castaneda, Menezes, & Ojeda-Vargas, 2017). Moreover, Phenomenology aims to comprehend the phenomenon itself rather than information about it. It is not a study of a person's actual consciousness of their experiences but rather the experience itself. Unlike positivist research, which focuses on the causes of a phenomenon, phenomenological interviews allow us to investigate the happenings themselves. The explanation for the phenomenon's fundamental core is that phenomenology does not seek the "why" but instead, the "for what," in some way, of the experience and its significance. In addition, the study used ontological research wherein the researcher needs to have a clear view about reality or not be able to make the right methodological choices. In this study, the questions to collect and characterize in-depth participants' lived experiences in rendering education in remote schools in the new normal through interviews (Guerrero-Castañeda, Menezes, & Ojeda-Vargas, 2017; Lohse, 2017). Furthermore, qualitative research is a collection of interpretive and material acts that aid in our understanding of the world. It explores the concepts, ideas, perceptions, experiences, and points of view of the subject. These initiatives have a reverberating influence on the planet's human population. They use field notes, interviews, dialogues, photographs, recordings, and self-memo to transform the environment into a series of representations. At this level, qualitative research requires an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers study objects in their natural settings in order to make sense of or interpret events based on the meanings people assign to them (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Meanwhile, the structured interview is a set of questions that should be answered in a specific order. The semi-structured interview includes a guide that allows the order to be changed based on the conversation, allowing the researcher to stress particular questions. The in-depth interrogation necessitates the development of a theme, which may entail one or more meetings, depending on the notion or circumstance that is the focus (Guerrero-Castaneda, Menezes, & Ojeda-Vargas, 2017).

On the other hand, according to Creswell (2013), the ideal criteria for determining when phenomenology is applied is when the study challenge necessitates a deep understanding of human experiences shared by a group of people. He

proposes that the research group should be composed of 3 to 10 people. The group's members must explain their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities they have faced. The more varied the participants' experiences, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to isolate the underlying essences and common meanings attached to the event under investigation. The phenomenological investigator's or researcher's job is to build the object under investigation based on its manifestations, structures, and components (Ponce, 2014). Additionally, analyzing an experience in phenomenology seeks to characterize and interpret its meaning, often by finding crucial codes and significant themes. In this study, the researcher will look for common themes within and between interviews, occasionally incorporating study participants or other specialists in the analytic process. A comprehensive description of a theme that captures the primary significance of a lived experience results from phenomenological research (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

In summary, as much as the researcher is conducting a phenomenological study, the focus will be on a single structure phenomenon: the teachers' experiences, precisely the challenges of giving education in remote schools in the new normal. This will be done by conducting an in-depth interview with the research participants who have experienced the phenomenon. As the researcher, I will extract the most relevant statements of each key informant's description of the phenomenon and group them according to themes. Finally, the researcher will discuss these clustered experiences into stories of inspirations of desolation. The researcher identified the participants by setting the criteria which were essential in this study. These conditions aimed to ensure that the selected individuals had the same experiences regarding the studied phenomenon. In this study, the selected respondents were teachers assigned to any of the distant schools of Maitum, Sarangani Province. Also, they should be teaching in their respective stations for a minimum of 3 years. Moreover, the researcher purposely included nine (9) key informants teaching in remote schools in Maitum, Sarangani Province. The identity of the chosen informants is identified through the teacher's roster in the District Office of Maitum, Sarangani Province.

In most phenomenological studies, participants were selected using a technique known as purposive sampling which is explained as the use of particular criteria that participants must meet at the time of selection. In most cases, purposive sampling is recommended since focus group discussion, and interviews depend on participants' ability and capacity to provide relevant information (Lin, Hsu, Huang Su, Crawford, and Tang, 2017). Accordingly, six to twelve (6-12) respondents should be identified for an interview. When the sample is larger than one can handle, purposeful random sampling lends credibility; it lowers judgment within a particular category and is not meant for generality (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick, and Mukherjee, 2018).

Hence, the participants of this study were the officially assigned teachers in the remote public schools in Maitum, Sarangani Province. These were the teachers who have been working in the area for at least three years in the service. Only nine (9) selected Elementary and High School Teachers who comprised the study's research participants, conducted through a scheduled face-to-face interview. For those unavailable for face-to-face, phone calls (recorded interview) were made and through Google meet (for the focused group discussions). Participants of this study were teachers assigned to James Alfred Strong Integrated School, Upo Elementary School, Sison Elementary School, Tuanadatu Elementary School, and Batian Elementary School. These are some of the remote schools in Maitum, Sarangani Province.

#### Participants of the Study

Name of School	Number of Participants
James Alfred Strong Integrated School	2
Upo Elementary School	2
Sison Elementary School	1
Tuanadatu Elementary School	2
Batian Elementary School	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

### 3. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the analysis drawn from the experiences of the master teachers in the new normal.

#### Master Teachers' Experiences in New Normal

The analysis of the participants' experiences in the new normal has drawn five major themes that describes the experiences of the master teachers in the new normal and the impact of these experiences on their teaching. Table 1 presents the thematic analysis as the qualitative findings in this study.

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis**

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Themes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Collaboration and Support</li> <li>• Collaborations with colleagues</li> <li>• Assistance and teamwork</li> <li>• Provisions of technical support to colleagues</li> <li>• Purposes of technology in communication</li> <li>• Necessities of communication in distance setting</li> <li>• Advantages of having communication in this time of pandemic</li> <li>• Optimism towards present situations</li> <li>• Positive outlook towards life</li> <li>• Acceptance of the new normal setting to push forward</li> <li>• Challenges to Teaching Situations in the New Normal</li> <li>• Complexities to the delivery of instruction</li> <li>• Upholds teaching responsibility despite the challenges</li> <li>• Adapting to new career responsibilities</li> <li>• Alternative duties in the new normal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of Collaboration and Support</li> <li>• Essentials of Communication in a Distant Environment</li> <li>• Optimism and Resilience Towards Moving Forward</li> <li>• Complexities on Teaching Responsibilities</li> <li>• Adjustments to Novelties of Teaching in the New Normal</li> </ul>

The exploration and understanding the essence of the experiences of the master teacher include the importance of collaboration and support, essentials of communication in a distant environment, and. optimism and resilience towards moving forward. Their experiences have also drawn on the impacts of complexities on teaching responsibilities, and adjustments to the novelties of teaching in the new normal which will be reported in this part for further analysis and interpretation.

The perceptions on teachers' quality of life have worsen due to overload work in distance environment, anxieties, loneliness, and apprehensions about the pandemic and its impacts to life. Due to the new normal setting in time of pandemic, paradigm shift in the way teachers deliver quality education emerged as the distance learning modalities were put in place which are viewed to provide solutions for the unprecedented global pandemic despite the complexities to both teachers and learners.

#### Importance of Collaboration and Support

Since the present situation posed serious challenges to the workplace and basically to the norms of life, immense efforts to sustain the practice on duties and responsibilities of the master teachers are expected. The school closure greatly affected the deliverance of learning as well as the professional development of the teachers. With that said, the master teachers help in addressing some concerns on their fields and actualize the expected duties from them. As master teachers, they intend to provide technical assistance to their colleagues in which they never failed to do even in time of pandemic. The duties and responsibilities of the master teachers are never neglected even in this situation. In fact, their responsibilities have become more complicated as to the development of learning resources and providing technical assistance to their

colleagues at the same time. The master teachers also extend their assistance in providing peer coaching and supervision among their colleagues in the field either through online or face-to-face with maximum health measures. Collaboration and extension of support among the colleagues in the field are considered salient aspect in dealing the unprecedented condition in the new normal education. With this point, master teachers have indeed realized their responsibilities on providing technical support to embody collaboration among colleagues. This practice in the new normal setting is deemed important as there is convergence of efforts essential to survive the challenges in many aspects of life and society. The findings affirm that collaboration and partnership with the community is the most important at these challenging times of (Tria, 2020; IEEP-UNESCO, 2020; Michener et al., 2020). Honigsfeld and Nordmeyer (2021) supports that teachers can directly share resources with colleagues within the same school and across schools through technologies, and collaboration today is vital that allows teachers to learn new technologies like teleconferencing and online learning tools, integrate modern teaching approaches and share responsibility for creating resources to resolve the demands of present education setting.

### **Essentials of Communication in a Distant Environment**

With the new social environment that sets physical distance among the public as precautionary measures to contain the spread of the virus in the community, the delivery of instruction has been immensely affected as well as the convergence of the teachers, learners, and parents in school. In view thereof, the communication plan is deemed essential to connect everyone for the updates and actions to be done in support to the realization of the learning continuity. This consideration is drawn from these statement. Providing updates among the colleagues through any communications media is considered necessary particularly in a distant setting. Getting updates from constant communication through calls, text messaging, social media post, virtual conferencing, and others using technologies are very vital today for the sustainability of the programs and initiatives of the department. Moreover, constant communication keeps everyone involved in the delivery of the learning process to be informed in the implementation or development of action plans. This idea is transpired from these expressions: The emergence of the pandemic posed serious constrains on the physical activities of the teachers, learners, and parents that affected the manner of connectivity and communications. In view hereof, master teachers take prime initiatives to keep close with their colleagues, parents, and pupils through sharing information and updates via technology platforms such as text messaging, call, social media, virtual conferencing, and the like. This finding affirms the notion of DepEd (2020) that communications shall play a major role through the key stakeholders appreciation and support as it is a very essential since close contact is restricted. Hence, stakeholders perceive communication as a salient aspect in the delivery of learning in this time of pandemic to relay information, updates, and discussions of action plans necessary for the implementation of alternative learning delivery. Communication today is very essential aspect since there are set restrictions to close physical contact and convergences to public spaces. Through constant communication, they keep trends and updates on the current situations of the school, their colleagues, parents, pupils, and the entire community that even in a distant parameter could together set and realize visions to survive the challenges.

**Optimism and Resilience Towards Moving Forward** Despite the challenging situations in this time of pandemic, the master teachers still view the adversities with optimism to accept the challenges, cope up with the conditions, and be resilient in facing the complexities of life. The master teachers keep with them the positivity in order for them to move forward through accepting and embracing the situations and live with the new normal. Apparently, these undesirable situations are dealt with positive attitude for them to provide solutions and be productive in this pressing times. The positive outlook of the master teachers translates as their motivations to pursue their duties with joy and compassion. Being optimistic and upholding positive views with life and the situations result to tolerance that can be a strategy to perform tasks and responsibilities despite of the adversities. Having a positive outlook and perspectives help the master teachers and their colleagues to deal with pressures and negativities caused by the pressing situations. This attitude of the master teachers toward the situation exemplifies positive behavior in the stress management. This positive mind set is significantly considered in order to deliver results regardless of the undesirable situation. Moreover, the master teachers uphold the virtue of hope and resiliency as the face the challenges in the new normal.

Being resilient and hopeful are the qualities the master teachers possess in this pressing time for them to pursue life endeavors. These qualities of being positive become a means of the master teachers to cope up with the situation and do everything they could to resolve the challenges. Optimism and resilience are surprisingly what conceived form the experiences of the master teachers in the new normal education. Through this mindset, their enthusiasm and passion in their profession are kept alive, thus, radiates to their workplace and colleagues to possess the same. This attitude of the master teachers truly exemplifies resiliency and being tolerant of the challenges no matter how adverse it is.

This finding corroborates with the presumptions of various research studies (Baker et al., 2012; Jamon et al., 2020; De Villa & Manalo, 2020). The pandemic as indeed posed significant demands on teachers, however, support from colleagues and administrators were the most helpful to be optimistic to meet the ends (Baker et al., 2021). It is reported that teachers exemplify resiliencies as their better coping and performing their responsibilities. Also, teachers demonstrate resilience despite the limitations and threats which were turned into strengths and opportunities (Jamon et al., 2020) and still manage to cope with the new normal to continue their tasks (De Villa & Manalo, 2020).

### **Impact of their Experiences to Teaching**

These experiences of the master teacher in the new normal has impacted the manner they perform their responsibilities as complexities and adjustments arise in which they need to address and resolve in order for them to function effectively and efficiently. The new normal setting has indeed drawn complexities on the teaching responsibilities of the master teachers as limitations were set. Also, their adjustments to the present setting to resolve the predicaments are apparent into their shared experiences.

**Complexities on Teaching Responsibilities** .The phenomenological study on the master teachers' present lived conditions revealed their prominent experience on the adversities and novelties on their responsibilities in the new normal. It was ascertained from their experiences that master teachers are confronted with challenges in terms of their responsibilities they need to perform in the present teaching situations. The master teachers experience serious problems in dealing with the delivery of lessons due to the constraints of modular distance learning modality, restricted school schedules, and stressful requisition of learners and parents to be actively involved.

The premier concern of the master teachers in this pressing situation is the delivery of instruction through modular distance learning specifically on the distribution and retrieval of modules. In addition, teachers also found negative aspects in the implementation of the modular instruction that further influenced the complexities the master teachers have encountered in the performance of their duties in the delivery of instruction. Among these challenges, taking overtime in preparing the modules has been a practice among the master teachers for them to accomplish the task assigned to them specifically the preparation of modules. Further, the responsibilities of the master teacher in this time of pandemic are greatly challenged as to the complexities and demands of the new normal setting since there are many restrictions, limitations, and insufficiencies in terms of resources, communications, and manpower. The present setting is predetermined with the necessities in the distance learning. The new normal setting has posed complexities on the teaching responsibilities of the master teachers in terms of the utility of the technologies which are essential resources in the continuity of learning delivery in this time of pandemic. These complexities in the new normal affects the teaching responsibilities of the master teachers to ensure effective and efficient delivery of their performance most particularly among their colleagues and the learners. This finding aligns with the notions that the unprecedented global shutdown was compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic that posed challenges to students, and teachers in many nations as schools were closed (Roe et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2021; Lee & Hubbs, 2021). The school closures impact the changes in education system that provoked complexities to teaching in various ways. The new normal has offered opportunities for growth and exploration for those educations and learning institutions that have embraced this change to best meet the present and future needs of the learners

### **Adjustments to the Novelties of Teaching in the New Normal**

The performance of the responsibilities of the master teachers in times of pandemic requires much effort and the need to learn things to adapt today is found to be necessary. The adjustments master teachers have exerted their way too much just to fulfill their duties in the field. Apparently, this kind of adjustment to workloads and responsibilities are quite challenging but for the sake of providing learning resources in the delivery of instruction, master teachers dealt with it with commitment. On the other perspectives, master teachers also are confronted with unprecedented conditions in dealing with the parents. In regards with the parents, problems exist on the means of coordinating with them during the distribution and retrieval of the modules. Also, master teachers found constrains on assigning tasks to parents on what to do in the modular tasks. The dilemmas presented by the new learning conditions among teachers and parents in facilitating the learning delivery need focus and resolutions to effectively realize the meaningful learning in spite of the distance learning modality. The findings are consistent with Ross-Hain's (2020) conclusion that teachers alter their instructions due to time constraints, methods of delivery, and consideration of learners' well-being that affect the ways teachers teach today.

Along with this new learning conditions, new unprecedented challenges as to the responsibilities and duties of the master teachers not only in the school premise but also extends to several elements. The novelties on the responsibilities of the master teachers are indeed challenging as they are confronted with new normal conditions. The situation has called for

more intimate dedication for work, compassion for others, and extra effort to realize the continuity of the delivery of instruction in time of pandemic. These challenges have required the master teacher to take on new responsibilities that they willingly and efficiently performed despite of all odds and complexities. The findings are consistent with the assertions of Lizana et al., (2021) that even before the pandemic, teachers were already perceived of low quality of life with great impact on their mental and physical health due to many stress factors influenced by work overload.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

##### **Implication of the Study**

The findings of the study on the experiences of the master teachers in the new normal education imply that despite the complexities caused by the pandemic in the education sector, master teachers have competently performed their duties and responsibilities taking new heights to resolve the demands of the situations.

Also, this study entails that DepEd should look into considerations of the adversities of the new normal education and find sustainable solutions particularly on the delivery of instructions through modular distance learning modality which involves the teachers and the parents. As there are novelties to the responsibilities of the master teachers in the new normal, the department should evaluate the roles of the master teachers and consider those essential only under their concern to ensure also their personal welfare as they are being confronted with more workloads. Moreover, there should be psychological and mental symposium for the teachers to uphold their sound well-being and their positive outlook in life despite of the undesirable conditions. It is also deemed important to extend assistance to struggling teachers and those technologically challenged for an intensive training on the use of technologies that are essential for communication in today's social environment setting. Additionally, the collaborations and teamwork among the teachers in the field should be strengthened in order to sustain the good relationship, extension of support, and unity that are considered key factors in bringing positive change in the workplace.

##### **Implication for the Future Use**

This study also encourages future researchers to conduct similar study in their context to capture the experiences of the teachers on the new normal education and other aspects that can be a meaningful focus of the study. The findings of the study have offered rich perspectives and insights that can be valuable in understanding the current situations of the master teachers in the field as they face the challenges of the new normal education. Further, future researches may focus on other perspectives that impact the lives of the public-school teachers in the field as the direct effects of pandemic present challenges in their ways of life.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The exploration on the experiences of the master teachers in the new normal education has revealed eminent constructs that enclose their duties and responsibilities, the challenges that they have encountered, their practices on extending technical support, and application of constant communication. Also, the study found out that master teachers possess positive outlook to situations and execute collaborations and teamwork with colleagues. Despite the pressing situations, the master teachers uphold their responsibilities for the best interest in delivering positive outcomes to the community. The essence of their experiences in the new normal education transcends to the importance of collaboration and support, essentials of communication in a distant environment, optimism and resilience towards moving forward, complexities on teaching responsibilities, and adjustments to the novelties of teaching in the new normal. These emergent themes from their experiences subsume their performance of their duties and responsibilities as master teachers and their perceptions that help bridge resolutions toward the complexities of new normal education

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