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Challenges and Opportunities of Elementary Teachers in the New Normal Education

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Abstract

This study examined the challenges and opportunities experienced by elementary teachers in the new normal education in the Third Congressional District of the Schools Division of Iloilo, Philippines, during the school year 2021–2022, as a basis for developing an instructional training program. Anchored on the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) framework, the study employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 60 elementary teachers. Data were collected using a researcher-modified questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics, the Mann–Whitney U test, and Spearman rho correlation. Findings revealed that teachers experienced a moderately challenging level of difficulties (M = 2.68), primarily involving limited internet connectivity, health safety concerns, insufficient technological devices, and financial constraints. Conversely, respondents reported a high level of opportunities (M = 3.85), particularly in professional learning, personal development, technological adaptation, and learner engagement. No significant differences were found in challenges and opportunities when respondents were classified according to age, sex, and civil status. However, a significant negative relationship was established between challenges and opportunities ($r_s = -0.453$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater challenges were associated with fewer perceived opportunities. Based on these findings, a five-day instructional training program focusing on technological competencies and digital instructional applications was proposed. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by emphasizing teacher professional development and inclusive instructional practices, and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) through educational technology integration. Its sustainability implications highlight the importance of continuous professional development, institutional technical assistance, and adaptable instructional strategies in strengthening educational resilience and sustaining quality elementary education.

Keywords: Descriptive-Correlational Research; Educational Technology; Elementary Teachers; Instructional Training Program; New Normal Education; Professional Development; Teaching Challenges and Opportunities

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed elementary education by requiring teachers to adopt alternative instructional approaches while ensuring educational continuity. The transition to the new normal presented challenges involving technological accessibility, instructional delivery, learner engagement, and professional adaptation. However, it also created opportunities for instructional innovation and professional development. This study examined the challenges and opportunities of elementary teachers in the Third District of the Schools Division of Iloilo, Philippines, as a basis for developing an instructional training program.

The implementation of new normal education required elementary teachers to adjust their instructional strategies, utilize digital platforms, and maintain communication with learners despite limited resources. Challenges included

unstable internet connectivity, inadequate technological devices, and difficulties managing remote instruction. Despite these difficulties, the transition encouraged teachers to develop technological competence, resourcefulness, and innovative instructional practices. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Cabardo et al., 2022; Cahapay et al., 2021).

Related literature identifies technological limitations, home learning conditions, and instructional adaptation as major challenges in the new normal. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Al Mazrooei et al., 2022; Barrot et al., 2021).

Globally, the pandemic exposed inequalities in technological accessibility and educational resources. Within the Third District of the Schools Division of Iloilo, elementary teachers faced similar challenges, emphasizing the need for localized instructional support and professional development. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Bautista & Aranas, 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development et al., 2022).

The study was anchored on the Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) framework, which explains adaptation to rapidly changing and unpredictable environments. In education, this framework provides a perspective for understanding teachers' responses to instructional disruptions and emerging opportunities. The conceptual framework considered age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, and teaching position as independent variables, while teachers' levels of challenges and opportunities served as dependent variables. The study examined differences across respondent groups and the relationship between challenges and opportunities, with the findings intended to guide the development of an instructional training program.

Existing literature discusses remote learning, technological barriers, and instructional adaptation; however, the specific challenges and opportunities experienced by elementary teachers require further localized examination. This study addressed the need to assess teachers' challenges and opportunities according to their demographic and professional characteristics, determine significant differences and relationships, and develop an instructional training program based on the findings. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Klusmann et al., 2022; Sanchez et al., 2022).

The study aligns primarily with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by addressing instructional accessibility, teaching effectiveness, and professional development. These connections emphasize the importance of inclusive and adaptable elementary education. Related scholarship addresses these issues (UNESCO, 2023).

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying challenges and opportunities that influence teachers' ability to maintain quality instruction. It supports technological sustainability through adaptable learning modalities and institutional sustainability through professional development, technical assistance, and instructional support. The findings may guide school administrators and education officials in developing a responsive instructional training program that strengthens teachers' competencies, adaptability, and capacity to sustain effective elementary education. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Wohlfart & Wagner, 2023; Zhou et al., 2024).

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the challenges, needs, and opportunities of elementary teachers in the new normal education. According to R. This design enabled the assessment of teachers' experiences and their relationships with demographic and professional characteristics.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the Third Congressional District of the Schools Division of Iloilo, Philippines, during the school year 2021–2022. The district comprises nine municipalities, namely Badiangan, Bingawan, Cabatuan, Calinog, Janiuay, Lambunao, Maasin, Mina, and Pototan. The study focused on the challenges and opportunities experienced by elementary teachers in implementing new normal education.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents were elementary school teachers from the Third Congressional District of Iloilo during the school year 2021–2022. They were classified according to age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, and length of service to examine differences in their perceived challenges, needs, and opportunities in implementing new normal education.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 60 elementary teachers from the Third Congressional District of Iloilo, which comprises the nine municipalities of Badiangan, Bingawan, Cabatuan, Calinog, Janiuay, Lambunao, Maasin, Mina, and Pototan.

Respondents were classified according to their demographic and professional characteristics to facilitate comparative analysis of their perceived challenges and opportunities in new normal education.

2.5 Research Instrument

A researcher-modified questionnaire was utilized to assess the challenges, needs, and opportunities of elementary teachers in the new normal education. The instrument consisted of two parts: the respondents' demographic profile and statements concerning their experiences, with 15 items intended for each of the three categories. Responses were measured using a five-point scale ranging from 5 (Always) to 1 (Never). Mean scores were interpreted as 4.21–5.00 (Always), 3.41–4.20 (Frequently), 2.61–3.40 (Moderately), 1.81–2.60 (Less), and 1.00–1.80 (Not a Problem). The instrument underwent content validation by the research adviser and designated validators. Recommendations were incorporated before reliability testing and final administration.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Following validation and reliability testing, the researcher secured approval from the Dean of the Graduate School and the Schools Division Superintendent of Iloilo. The questionnaires were personally distributed through the designated school authorities and retrieved upon completion. Responses were organized, classified, and encoded according to the study variables. Data processing and statistical analysis were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics, while mean scores determined their perceived levels of challenges, needs, and opportunities. The Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests examined significant differences across respondent classifications, while Spearman rho determined significant relationships among the study variables. These statistical techniques provided the basis for interpreting the findings and identifying areas for instructional improvement.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Demographic Profile of the Respondents

3.1.1 Age, Sex, Civil Status, Educational Attainment, and Position

The study involved 60 elementary teachers, with 67% aged 30 years and below and 33% above 30 years old. Most respondents were female (67%) and married (55%), while 33% were male and 45% were single. All respondents (100%) held bachelor's degrees and occupied Teacher I positions. These findings indicate that the respondents were predominantly young, female, and married teachers with similar educational qualifications and teaching positions. This profile provides the basis for examining their experiences and perceptions of new normal education.

3.2 Challenges Encountered by Elementary Teachers

3.2.1 Overall Level of Challenges

The elementary teachers experienced a moderately challenging level of difficulties (M=2.68). The primary challenges were lack of internet connectivity (M=3.03), limited health safety (M=2.90), insufficient gadgets (M=2.78), lack of face masks and face shields (M=2.77), and financial hardship (M=2.68). Less challenging concerns included inadequate technical equipment (M=2.57), noncompliance with precautionary measures (M=2.55), insufficient instructional modules (M=2.53), lack of COVID-19 prevention policies (M=2.52), and limited webinar training (M=2.52). These findings emphasize the difficulties teachers faced in accessing technology, maintaining health safety, and managing financial limitations during the pandemic. Such challenges required adjustments to teaching arrangements and personal responsibilities.

3.2.2 Challenges According to Demographic Characteristics

The overall challenge level across demographic classifications was moderately challenging (M=2.69). Teachers aged 30 years and below (M=2.74), female teachers (M=2.76), and single teachers (M=2.80) reported moderately challenging experiences. Meanwhile, teachers above 30 years old (M=2.57), male teachers (M=2.54), and married teachers (M=2.59) reported less challenging experiences. Respondents with bachelor's degrees and Teacher I positions both recorded a moderately challenging mean of 2.69. These findings suggest that challenges were experienced across demographic groups, although their reported levels varied. The differences reflect the diverse circumstances teachers encountered during the pandemic.

3.3 Opportunities Experienced by Elementary Teachers

3.3.1 Overall Level of Opportunities

The respondents reported a high level of opportunities in the new normal education (M=3.85). The highest-rated opportunities included learning new things (M=4.18), reflecting on personal values (M=4.18), recognizing friendship and kindness (M=4.08), and spending additional time at home (M=3.97). Other opportunities involved supporting learners' academic needs (M=3.92), engaging through digital platforms (M=3.92), acquiring new

knowledge (M=3.88), understanding learners more deeply (M=3.83), and becoming familiar with their home environments (M=3.82). Opportunities related to professional collaboration, learner rapport, and work improvement also received high ratings. These findings indicate that teachers recognized opportunities for personal growth, professional development, and stronger learner engagement despite pandemic-related difficulties.

3.3.2 Opportunities According to Demographic Characteristics

The overall level of opportunities remained high across demographic classifications (M=3.85). Teachers aged 30 years and below (M=3.87) and those above 30 years old (M=3.81) reported high opportunities. Similarly, male (M=4.06) and female (M=3.75) teachers obtained high ratings. Both single and married teachers also reported high opportunities, while respondents with bachelor's degrees and Teacher I positions recorded a mean of 3.85. These findings suggest that opportunities for professional learning and adaptation were recognized across demographic groups.

3.4 Significant Differences in Challenges and Opportunities

3.4.1 Differences in Challenges According to Demographic Characteristics

The Mann–Whitney U test revealed no significant differences in the level of challenges according to age ($z=0.950$, $p=0.342$), sex ($z=1.333$, $p=0.183$), and civil status ($z=1.535$, $p=0.125$). Differences according to educational attainment and teaching position could not be determined because all respondents were bachelor's degree holders occupying Teacher I positions. These findings indicate that teachers experienced statistically comparable challenges regardless of age, sex, or civil status. However, the present findings did not establish significant differences based on these characteristics.

3.4.2 Differences in Opportunities According to Demographic Characteristics

The Mann–Whitney U test also revealed no significant differences in opportunities according to age ($z=0.085$, $p=0.932$), sex ($z=0.918$, $p=0.359$), and civil status ($z=1.630$, $p=0.103$). Educational attainment and teaching position could not be compared because all respondents belonged to the same classifications. These findings indicate that perceived opportunities were statistically comparable across the demographic groups examined.

3.5 Relationship Between Challenges and Opportunities

3.5.1 Correlation Between Challenges and Opportunities

Spearman rho analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between the challenges and opportunities experienced by elementary teachers ($r_s=-0.453$, $p=0.000$). This indicates that higher levels of challenges were associated with lower levels of perceived opportunities. The findings suggest that technological limitations, financial difficulties, and health-related concerns may restrict teachers' ability to maximize educational opportunities.

3.6 Proposed Instructional Training Program

3.6.1 Retooling Teachers in the New Normal

Based on the findings, a five-day training program entitled Retooling Teachers in the New Normal was proposed to improve teachers' technological competencies. The program focused on using laptops, educational software, and digital applications such as Canva and GeoGebra to develop instructional materials. Its activities included collaborative planning, needs assessment, training workshops, and software demonstrations. The proposed implementation was scheduled for January 2023, involving district supervisors, school heads, district coordinators, and teachers, with an estimated budget of ₱150,000.00. The proposed program addresses the identified challenges involving limited gadgets, internet connectivity, and technological skills. Strengthening teachers' technological competencies may help them adapt to the demands of new normal education and improve instructional delivery. Related scholarship addresses these issues (Ancho & Arrieta, 2021; Beardsley et al., 2021; Heine et al., 2023; Masoumi & Noroozi, 2025; Smestad et al., 2023; Tijap et al., 2022; Velandia Rodriguez et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study revealed that most elementary teacher respondents were female, married, and aged 30 years and below, with all holding bachelor's degrees and occupying Teacher I positions. The teachers experienced a moderately challenging level of difficulties in the new normal education while reporting a high level of opportunities for professional growth and adaptation. No significant differences were found in their perceived challenges and opportunities when classified according to age, sex, and civil status. However, a significant negative relationship was established between challenges and opportunities, indicating that increased challenges were associated with decreased opportunities. Based on these findings, a training program focused on retooling teachers in modern technology and educational applications was developed to strengthen their instructional competencies.

School heads are encouraged to strengthen technical assistance, mentoring, coaching, and Learning Action Cell activities to improve teachers' competencies in using educational software. Teachers should enhance their technology-assisted instructional practices, develop digital learning materials, and apply appropriate teaching strategies to improve learners' performance. The researcher is encouraged to present the findings to the Schools Division Supervisor to facilitate the implementation of the proposed training program and disseminate the study through research presentations and publication. Future researchers are recommended to conduct qualitative investigations and related studies to further explore the challenges experienced by elementary teachers in the new normal education.

The study was limited to elementary teachers in the Third Congressional District of the Schools Division of Iloilo, Philippines, during the school year 2021–2022. It involved 60 respondents, all of whom held bachelor's degrees and occupied Teacher I positions, restricting comparisons based on educational attainment and teaching position. The investigation focused on teachers' perceived challenges and opportunities in the new normal education, with comparisons limited to age, sex, and civil status and an examination of the relationship between the two principal variables.

5. Compliance with ethical standards

The author acknowledges the participation of elementary teachers from the Third Congressional District, Schools Division of Iloilo, Philippines, and the institutional support of Northwest Samar State University. Data were collected through a non-invasive, questionnaire-based method, with respondents assured that their information would be treated confidentially and no identifying information disclosed in the reporting of findings. The study involved institutional permission to administer the research instrument. No conflict of interest or external funding was received for this study.

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