

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching in Tumultuous Times: Unraveling Teachers' Experiences amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Teachers are the most significant assets in any educational institution. They serve as an avenue for conveying knowledge, skills, and values to students. They play a vital role in reforming and strengthening the education system of any country. However, education in the new normal requires numerous adaptations, as teachers were unprepared when the pandemic struck. This qualitative study sought to discover the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) from teachers' lived experiences in teaching during the pandemic. A total of 28 participants were involved, who had first-hand experiences of teaching tertiary level in the new normal in a university. The qualitative phenomenological research design was used in this study. Thus, teaching in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic provided teachers' deficiencies in some course delivery; however, they worked diligently to transform and demonstrate resilience in teaching in the new normal amidst pandemics, converting them into strengths and opportunities. On the other hand, instructors' and professors' strengths should be recognized, and professional development opportunities should be provided to help them become more competent educators.

KEYWORDS:

collaboration, module writing, new normal, pedagogical skills.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Following the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, a global suspension of face-to-face classes and widespread school closures were implemented in an attempt to contain the viral transmission, affecting over 90% of the world's student population (UNESCO, 2020).

Moreover, the Philippines is one of the countries most afflicted by the virus on a global scale. According to the most recent data, the Philippines is ranked 19th among countries with the highest viral infection rates. Despite the government's lockdowns and tight health standards, the virus's infection rate continues to increase. As a result, Filipinos are projected to continue living under the "new normal" for an extended period of time. Businesses, transportation, public services, health, and education are the sectors that are most impacted by this new situation (Jamon et al., 2021).

To preserve educational continuity, institutions transitioned to emergency remote instruction that was logistically feasible, typically with little time for preparation. Transitioning to and implementing the new teaching and learning format has created numerous problems, risks, and challenges for teachers and students (Cachón-Zagalaz et al., 2020; Bao, 2020; and Hiraoka & Tomoda, 2020).

Education's quality, therefore, is directly proportionate to the quality of its teachers and teaching. The way teachers are trained is an important aspect of improving the quality of teaching. Teachers are one of the critical components of this process, as they are one of the primary instruments in delivering quality learning to students. Moreover, education has a significant impact on molding the lives of students. Teachers are the education system's most valuable resources. They are established at the nexus of knowledge, skill, and value transfer to students. Further, teacher education plays an essential role in improving and developing any higher education system. Further, teacher education must reflect both global educational trends and the broader needs and aspirations of the public. They are significant in ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality education in the face of the pandemic (Castroverde & Acala, 2021). It cannot be denied, however, that teaching in the new normal has its own set of challenges and threats. A study conducted by Lapada et al. (2020) found that teachers were very aware of the COVID-19 pandemic's existence and its consequences. On the other hand, teachers also discuss their concerns via modular distance education. Indeed, the majority of teachers do not appear to have the necessary skills to teach online; either they have not been trained or they have never taught online (Saraswati et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers' health is jeopardized (Asbury & Kim, 2020), as they are responsible for physically distributing and retrieving modules from parents or guardians (Jamon et al., 2021). Furthermore, educators face dread, anxiety, and under-appreciation in their profession. Teaching in the new normal affects instructors' mental health and wellbeing (Kima et al. 2020; Watermeyer et al. 2020; Schaffhauser, 2020; Ramberg, 2019).

On the other hand, education in the new normal has several benefits and drawbacks. For example, teachers can acquire new skills through the use of technology. They become acquainted with Google Classroom as an educational platform (Jamon et al., 2021; and Chua et al., 2020). Further, Bagoood (2020) emphasized that as frontline educators, they have received various training and seminars to equip them better to deliver quality education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a departmental policy to train teachers not only for professional growth but also for unexpected circumstances. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic threat, teachers continue to serve by developing modules as the students' learning guides. Thus, the teacher becomes a catalyst for the student's growth as an individual and community member (Martineau et al., 2020). Meanwhile, additional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be revealed based on the teachers' direct experiences. Leiber, Stensaker, and Harvey (2018) underlined the framework of SWOT analysis as a framework centered on identifying internal and external aspects that may impact the examined process or structure. On the other hand, it describes the defined subject as a methodical evaluation approach that aids in strategic decision making. SWOT Analysis is used to establish future-oriented plans by highlighting the organization's strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Güldiken, 2016). By highlighting the strengths, it can help to develop strategies that aim to capitalize on opportunities, strengthen weaknesses, and protect against risks (Erçetin, 2019). The SWOT analysis technique can provide a solid foundation for a thorough study of the topic features (O'Brien et al., 2020). The major goals of the study may be summarized as building strengths, minimizing weaknesses, seizing opportunities, and opposing threats (Leiber et al., 2018). The most essential element is that it enables the appraisal of both internal and external problems (Arslan, 2021).

Thus, this study aims to provide knowledge and explore the lived experiences of higher education institution teachers during this new normal amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It specifically seeks to discover teachers' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in teaching during the pandemic.

Moreover, the current study is grounded in a reflective practice approach. It is a process through which teachers are assisted in reflecting on and interpreting their experiences to broaden their pedagogical repertoire (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Additionally, it facilitates teaching, learning, and comprehension, and it is critical to the professional development of teachers. By constantly examining their behaviors and experiences, teachers grow professionally (Mathew et al., 2017). Further, this refers to the capacity to reflect on one's activities to engage in the process of continual learning (Habib, 2017). Thus, this theory applies to the current COVID-19 pandemic scenario, in which teachers reflect on the difficulties they face in the new normal.

2 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is primarily qualitative. It adopts a descriptive phenomenological method (Patton, 2015). This technique enables the researchers to maintain the participants' "voice" without abstracting their perspective through analysis (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This laid the framework for delving into the experiences of a group of people (teachers) who experienced a shared understanding and examining any emotions, reactions, feelings, changes, or issues that may have arisen as a result of the shared experience.

The study involved 28 faculty members, purposely and conveniently chosen from Quirino State University, Cabarroguis Campus. The researchers purposely selected the participants who they believed would provide adequate knowledge and understanding of the topic being investigated. Purposive sampling was used to determine the eligibility of the participants based on the following criteria: 1) Quirino State University, Cabarroguis Campus instructor/professor; 2) first-hand teaching experience in the new normal; 3) voluntary participation in the interview; and 4) has an active cell phone number and messenger.

To collect data, the researchers obtained permission from the campus administrator and the selected participants, notifying them of the nature of the study, the topic to be discussed, and the scope of their participation. Once the participants obtained their consent via a Google form, the researcher scheduled a video/phone call interview based on their convenience and availability. The participants were also informed about the ethical considerations, such as maintaining privacy throughout the study (Kaiser, 2009).

The study used an in-depth and semi-structured questionnaire to gather data on teachers' lived experiences of teaching in the new normal. All questions on the questionnaire were open-ended, allowing respondents to elaborate as desired and the researcher to qualify and clarify their responses through video/phone call interviews. The participants were interviewed using dialogues in Ilocano, their native language, and Filipino, their "lingua franca," to ensure the fullness of the data. Furthermore, the interview lasted for 30–45 minutes per participant. Nonetheless, this time restriction was extended since multiple comments from participants were elicited. This is to guarantee that sufficient data was retrieved from the conversations and that the saturation limit was reached.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the utterances were translated, interpreted, and reviewed to ensure that the articulations retained their original meaning. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological approach was used to collect and analyze the data. This data analysis technique is rigorous and robust, ensuring the results' legitimacy and trustworthiness. It enables academics to elucidate emerging themes and their interwoven relationships. Additionally, significant themes and meanings were analyzed through rigorous data analysis to produce the research study's composite findings. Finally, correspondence and critical friend techniques were done to ensure the reported data's trustworthiness and reliability.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This theme pertains to the participants' abilities, skills, and traits that they have exhibited and possess while teaching during the pandemic.

3.1 | STRENGTH

Theme #1. Working with optimism, dedication, patience, and commitment

Education is believed to be dependent on the teacher. As such, they should receive adequate educational and professional training to gain the requisite knowledge and teaching abilities and devote themselves to the teaching profession. In this study, the first strength of teachers in teaching in the new normal in the Philippines is working with optimism, dedication, patience, and commitment. These are evident from the following statements from the participants:

“Despite all struggles, I should remain positive. I have to exert effort to give a better output for my students.” (P2)

“Maximum tolerance is needed for students who submit their modules late.” (P4)

“Despite all struggles, I should remain positive. I have to exert effort to give a better output for my students.” (P2)

“Yes, patience is important, especially most of my students have poor internet connection.” (P13)

“In the event of a pandemic, they suffer from financial constraints, so I should give them consideration.” (P7)

“Of course, I have to equip myself better so that my students will learn something” (P17)

Theme #1 reflects how teachers work with optimism as they exert their efforts despite challenges; their dedication and commitment are evident through the considerations given to students, and teachers' patience is also manifested through giving maximum tolerance to students.

The result implies that teachers' skills and values are necessary for continued success in the new normal. Teachers' values are significant in the performance of their tasks and obligations. It's gratifying to discover that teachers possess specific skills and values that contribute to achieving quality education in the new normal. Also, it's worth noting that instructors remain committed to their work despite the pandemic. Further, a committed and dedicated teacher is continuously seeking unique and innovative methods to help students. This fact would have an impact on the academic and personal development of the learners. Meanwhile, teachers' dedication to work helps students be motivated in their studies in these trying times. For them, demonstrating their concern for their students simply by communicating with them consistently is very impressive.

The result is supported by Celik et al. (2017) that teaching requires a high level of commitment. Similarly, Timperley et al. (2007) asserted that being a teacher is driven by the desire to enhance the lives of students. They become frustrated when they lack the necessary skills, equipment, and support to engage their students successfully. Further, Bhowmik & Sahai (2018) posited that optimistic individuals possess the capacity for initiative, adaptability, and a variety of scenarios. Additionally, these individuals think, feel, and behave in ways that contribute to the achievement of successful outcomes. Moreover, this attitude of the participants is supported by Cagri (2018), who affirmed that devoted teachers are concerned with their students' development. Teachers committed and dedicated to their job and their students' growth play a critical role in their development. Additionally, the participants also demonstrated extraordinary patience and consideration. This technique is consistent with the assertions of Cheng and Towle (2017), who emphasized the need for patient educators to utilize various instructional strategies, including both individualistic and social perspectives on learning.

Theme #2. Collaboration and resourcefulness as essential traits.

Effective teacher collaboration is defined as sharing classroom experiences regularly to develop pedagogical skills and motivate colleagues to explore new things (Poulos et al., 2013). In this paper, the second strength of the participants is their resourcefulness and their ability to collaborate with colleagues. The statements below indicate how the participants are described as being innovative and having the ability to collaborate with peers.

"I solicit the ideas of my colleagues and my boss concerning the content of my module." (P3)

"I refer serious problems to my fellow instructors and listen to their advice." (P1)

"I have to use my wifi connection to conduct online class." (P8)

"I search the internet for me to write a comprehensive module." (P12)

"I usually ask the assistance of IT experts in conducting my online class." (P16)

"I did not receive formal module writing training, I was guided by my supervisors and co-workers."

This theme shows that instructors in the new normal gained essential abilities such as collaboration and resourcefulness. It was established that effective teacher collaboration necessitates instructors sharing common goals, being practical, and having a positive interdependence. Moreover, the participants expressed that teaching in these pandemic times is more difficult without the help of their colleagues and program chairs.

This implies that teachers have developed the ability to educate using an online platform with the support of IT professionals in the academe. Meanwhile, the faculty members expressed that they lacked resources for designing modules and conducting online classes, but they made it possible through their immeasurable efforts and initiatives. Hence, teachers are considered resourceful if they can improve their students' learning outcomes and achievements in ways that are obvious in their behavior and performance.

This finding is consistent with Burton's (2015) research on the effect of teacher cooperation on teacher learning and growth. This approach corroborates Soriano's (2020) findings that teachers who cultivate collaboration are more enthusiastic about

their professions, have a greater love for their careers, have higher expectations for their students, and are more confident and devoted to progress. Additionally, this underlines the concepts of Asiegbu & Okpala (2019) who emphasized that instructors' resourcefulness is defined as their ability to use the most effective language, methods, and materials to elicit the best results from pupils.

3.2 | WEAKNESS

This theme relates to teachers' inadequacies and weaknesses in teaching in the new normal.

Theme #1. The necessity of innovative, pedagogical skills, knowledge, and competence in the new normal.

Pedagogical skills are defined as information combined with strategies that may be implemented mechanically and the acquisition of processes that every teacher requires to save time and resources for more essential aspects of their career (Liakopoulou, 2011). Teachers in this research understand the vital nature of pedagogical skills and knowledge when teaching in the new normal. This is evident from their responses:

"I find it difficult to write modules since I don't have any formal training." (P18)

"Teaching through the online platform requires skills especially some of my students are technology savvy." (P22)

"I feel so guilty that my students do not understand the lessons in my modules." (P11)

"I had no idea on how to teach the students in this new normal." (P9)

The theme reflected that faculty members have acknowledged that they are strangers in today's educational system in the Philippines. They admitted that they lack knowledge, skills, and competence in blended teaching in the new normal. The teacher-participants admitted that teaching in the new normal brought them a dilemma, especially since they were not fully equipped with knowledge and skills for the new educational standards. This implies the current scenario compels the development of new modes, tools, methods, and experiences for teaching and learning.

This finding is justified by Mallillin (2021), stressing that creative teaching and learning strategies are employed to ensure that students gain the necessary competency-based education and context development for the current norms and trends. Another factor affecting educators' expectations of students, instruction's adaptation to the peculiar situation, students' abilities, assessment of their activity, and potential assessment difficulties is their sense of competence (Jelinska & Paradowski, 2021). Meanwhile, Peters et al. (2020) believe that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a re-evaluation of the key educational objectives and how they might be used and regenerated in the vision of education to build more just and democratic societies. Also, Yorgancioglu (2020) recommends that new pedagogies should be "technology-driven." This is what Peters et al. (2020) refer to as "digital pedagogies."

Theme #2. Difficulty in monitoring, providing feedback and assessing student learning

Tracking students' progress through a collection of their work, evaluation, and grading is the most effective technique to determine whether they continue to learn despite the country's new educational system. Unfortunately, the participants in this study have difficulties tracking their students' outputs. Indeed, as expressed by the teacher-participants, this is another factor to consider when adopting teaching and learning as the new normal in a higher education institution. These include the challenges inherent in monitoring knowledge and feedback as well as evaluating students' learning. This is apparent from the participants' statements:

"We failed to provide feedback to all students because we can't contact some of them. Some of them do not have their internet connectivity." (P15)

"Some of my students submitted incomplete answers. Others did not answer some of the activities." (P6)

“There are some students who failed to write their names in their modules that is why it’s difficult to determine whose output is being checked.” (P10)

“Several modules were gone, and I have no way of obtaining their grades.” (P5)

“I struggle with checking my students’ work because some of their answers were incomplete.” (P20)

The statements above reveal some of the problems that instructors and professors confront as they monitor, check, and evaluate students’ outputs in the modules. Furthermore, the participants recognized that effective communication is a common challenge for teachers while monitoring students’ performance. This results from students’ lack of gadgets and unreliable internet connectivity, as most monitoring occurs via messenger. However, teachers utilize text messages, although some students’ cellphone numbers are inactive and cannot be contacted. They also disclosed that they are challenged when it comes to checking and evaluating students’ output in the modules. Theme 2 further reflects that teachers find it challenging to check outputs with no answers as they have nothing to report regarding the students’ performance. Additionally, the absence of answers in their modules indicates that students are disinterested in the learning process. As a result, teachers often struggle to evaluate students who lack evidence of learning. Additionally, some students submit answer sheets without identifying themselves, making it impossible for a teacher to check without locating the owner of the output, mainly when recording scores. However, the validation of students’ learning is also a problem on the part of the teacher, since modules are being answered by parents and tutors, not the learners. Furthermore, the researchers discovered that the existing way of learning and giving instruction creates a dilemma in addressing students’ performance. The participants mentioned that they communicate with their students using text messaging and social media platforms like Facebook and Messenger. However, not all students in Quirino province have access to or can afford these devices. Some students live in places with low internet access. Due to this, teachers have difficulty updating students on their progress and providing feedback on their work. Furthermore, teachers were worried about their students’ progress.

The result implies that implementing new processes in teaching during the new normal creates challenges on the part of teachers. These challenges include monitoring, checking, and evaluating students’ outputs. And because of this, teachers encountered problems in updating students’ progress and providing feedback on their performance.

The finding is supported by the study of Castroverde & Acala (2021), who discovered that teachers could not provide feedback to students due to a shortage of technology, a bad internet connection, and health risks. This result corroborates Niemi & Kousa’s (2020) findings that even in Finland, where the highest quality education is provided, professors encounter difficulties with students’ assignments and examinations. This result agrees with Niemi & Kousa’s (2020) that the primary obstacles for teachers in Finland were non-authentic interaction and a lack of spontaneity, which face-to-face teaching provides.

3.3 | OPPORTUNITY

This theme alludes to the skills that teachers learn when teaching in the midst of a crisis.

Theme #1. Technologically inclined 21st-century educators

With the advent of computers in education, both teachers and students have found it easier to transfer knowledge. The use of technology has increased the enjoyment of teaching and learning for both students and teachers. In this study, the participants admitted that education in the new normal helped them become technologically inclined 21st-century educators. These skills include the applications of Google Classroom, Google Meet, and Zoom. Such narratives from participants include the following:

“I have learned to use google classroom in my online teaching.” (P2)

“Teaching online is very interesting because of the help of google classroom.”(P4)

“I was able to attend seminar using the zoom.” (P14)

“I learned to use quiz maker.” (P 20)

"I have learned to use the meet in disseminating announcements to my students." (P16)

"I am now familiar with google forms in gathering data for my research." (P14)

Teachers' comments indicate that using digital platforms in teaching in the new normal has numerous advantages. They become proficient in using online software applications for conducting online classes, making announcements, and attending meetings, training, and seminars. Furthermore, they were equipped with knowledge and skills in conducting research, mainly gathering data through Google forms. They also articulated that they were able to develop quizzes and examinations through quiz makers. It implies that teachers' engagement with technology has increased due to school cancellations caused by the pandemic, and they have gained confidence in utilizing it.

This is supported by Raja & Nagasubramani (2018) stating that technological advancements have transformed education. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Winter et al. (2021) that teachers regularly utilize technology and possess a high degree of proficiency with some programs and applications. Similarly, König et al. (2020) conducted a study in Germany exploring the teachers' learning opportunities relating to digital teaching. They found that most teachers have presented new learning content to their students, assigning tasks and offering feedback. Also, the study conducted by Chua et al. (2020) concluded that professors primarily used free platforms, including Google Classroom, Edmodo, Zoom, Facebook Messenger, Google Meet, We Chat, Schoology, and Moodle. Further, they said that professors and students readily adjusted to these new modifications to better align themselves with 21st-century learning skills.

On the other hand, the present study's results contradict the finding of Díaz (2020), who found that teachers lack competency in educational digitalization and need training. Similarly, Lucena et al. (2019) revealed that teachers in Spain have low digital competence in using digital platforms in teaching. In like manner, a study conducted in Nepal by Saraswati et al. (2020) discovered that most teachers lack the requisite skills for managing online classrooms due to training or prior experience. Moreover, Yorgancioglu (2020) affirmed that the current situation necessitates new teaching and learning modalities, tools, approaches, and experiences. Finally, Moralista & Oducado (2020) confirmed that faculty members in the Philippines should be encouraged, trained, and developed to better understand and utilize the multiple online education alternatives. Educators must also learn to embrace the COVID-19 pandemic. This may also be a great opportunity to improve their teaching skills and learn about online learning.

Theme #2. Enhanced skills in module writing

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, student and teacher face-to-face learning has been suspended. This pandemic has compelled the use of modular distance learning to ensure the continuity of education. The following statements demonstrate this:

"I was able to improve my ability to write an effective module." (P5)

"I got familiar with the different parts of the module now." (P18)

"I was able to develop critical thinking skills especially writing the enrichment activities of my module." (P3)

"It seems that my student's output improved a lot this second semester. "According to them, they easily understand the activities." (P21)

The preceding statements imply that teachers have gained expertise in writing modules, one of the most significant benefits of the curriculum, as a result of the new normal in Philippine education. Remarkably, the participants disclosed that they had trouble writing their modules during the first semester, but that they had significantly improved by the second semester. Indeed, this enhancement helped them achieve their ultimate goal of providing students with high-quality modules. The result implies that a significant benefit of the new normal in education in the Philippines is that teachers have gained expertise in writing instructional materials such as modules.

This is supported by the idea of Sadiq et al. (2014) that the modules' purpose is to equip instructors with materials to help them change their classrooms into active, student-centered learning environments. Furthermore, Lim (2016) noted that when students were taught utilizing the modular technique, they performed better and had a better understanding of the subject matter.

Similarly, the findings conform to Aksan's (2021) study, which revealed that students' perceptions agreed on using a modular distance learning approach (MDLA).

3.4 | THREAT

This theme relates to the risks posed to teachers as they carry out their duties throughout the pandemic.

Theme #1. Communication with students is a struggle

Teachers interact with students in person or online with the goal of transmitting knowledge, fostering comprehension, and building relationships. In this paper, the teacher-participants reveal difficulties in communicating with their students during these trying moments. As they expressed in the following statements:

"I found it difficult to communicate with my students, particularly those who live in remote barangays." (P19)

"I'm having trouble contacting my students to send them a soft copy of my modules." (21)

"I cannot communicate with them because of poor internet connections." (P7)

"I simply search for their Facebook accounts and send them a private message via messenger." (P13)

"I'm having difficulty contacting and follow up with students who are having difficulties with their studies via online platforms. I also have difficulty explaining or discussing with students their problems with their modules." (P15)

The above statements show the reasons why teachers struggle to communicate with their students. These struggles include distance from home to school, low or no internet access, and difficulty explaining, which caused the teachers' problems in the teaching and learning process.

The finding implies that reaching out to students is a difficulty among educators under the new normal, because communication with students is difficult for teachers to manage. This means that more students are at risk of failing or dropping out of school as a result of their teachers' failure to connect with them and provide feedback.

This finding is consistent with the assertion of Fontanos et al. (2020), who found that students who are not supervised and equipped with intervention are more likely to drop out. If not properly addressed, they may lose their chances to return to school. Furthermore, Coman et al. (2020) contended that students' academic performance is impacted by teachers' lack of engagement or communication abilities. Moreover, despite technical challenges, Blankstein et al. (2020) urged teachers to maintain a connection with their students. Furthermore, the participants prefer face-to-face instruction because it enables them to interact with their instructors and professors. This supports Alawamleh et al.'s (2020) claim that most students prefer traditional classroom classes over online classes due to issues such as lack of motivation and comprehension of material, less interaction between students and instructors, and an increased sense of isolation. Further, they stated that successful communication is the process of efficiently expressing ideas, thoughts, knowledge, and information.

Theme #2. COVID 19 Virus is a potential threat in the workplace

Teachers in this study are aware of the dangers posed by COVID-19 in the workplace. This is evident from their comments.

"I'm worried that I might be infected with the virus during module distribution and retrieval." (P19)

"Limited students are allowed to go to school during enrolment, so I am afraid one of them might be a carrier of the virus, or they might be infected with the virus. That would be my responsibility." (P9)

"Yeah, I consider it detrimental to my health, especially which I am traveling." (P17)

The comments above imply that the participants are concerned about the threat of the virus because they are physically responsible for the distribution and retrieval of modules from students at the assigned drop-off points. Furthermore, they emphasized

that the risk of infection from students who attend school during the enrollment period is also a concern. Other faculty members emphasized the potential risk associated with traveling to and from the workstation. The result implies that fear of virus transmission due to COVID-19 is a threat to both teachers and students.

This is supported by Mamun et al. (2020) stating that teachers and other personnel increasingly fear infection with the COVID-19 virus. Due to the disease's spread, individuals grow suspicious of others. Moreover, Asbury and Kim (2020) assert that the risk of infection may also be transferred to learners since classrooms of 30 students are frequently allowed to remain open. Furthermore, Dabrowski (2020) argued that teachers are more susceptible to infection than other frontline workers due to a lack of protective equipment, a lack of testing among asymptomatic students, and often improper hygiene procedures in the poorest universities. Participants also reported feeling anxious and stressed while teaching in these pandemic times. Leire et al. (2020) noted that instructors are in an unprecedented situation where teaching has become challenging. The lockdown situation changed their teaching methods and their relationships with students and co-workers. Further, teachers have also reported higher stress due to the lockdown's increased workload. Lastly, Kima et al. (2020) concluded that educators' mental health and wellbeing should be a major national and global priority, given the ramifications for educational systems now and in the future.

Theme #3. The quality of education is at risk

Another problem that educators confront during the pandemic is the possibility of not providing a high-quality education. As manifested in the following statements:

"I doubt that my students did not learn anything." (P4)

"Some of them did not answer some parts of their modules." (P6)

"I don't know if they learned something. I am afraid for the incoming board examinations." (P17)

"Their internship in the hospitals was suspended, so they cannot graduate. I am hopeful our students would still be accommodated in the hospitals for them to learn better." (P21)

"I prefer face-to-face so that there would be effective interaction" (P9)

"This pandemic brought a chaotic situation for us especially to the quality of education we give to students." (P3)

The preceding statements imply that teachers worry about the quality of education they deliver to their students. According to them, there is no guarantee that students will be able to complete their studies adequately during these pandemic times. It is evident from the students' incomplete outputs that their learning is at risk of being compromised. Furthermore, the participants explicitly recognized that the board examinations were affected since the new normal of education started. Also, the lack of practical internships in medical schools poses a burden to graduating students. Meanwhile, senior teachers acknowledged that they're unable to adapt to current trends in teaching in the new normal. They acknowledged that they lack technological abilities, which harms the quality of instruction they deliver to students.

It implies that the transition from face-to-face to online learning can be difficult for both students and teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic may also have an impact on this year's college graduates. Their studies were disrupted, and they were scheduled to graduate at the commencement of a global recession.

The current study's findings support prior studies in Ghana by Agormedah et al. (2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic has harmed the educational system. Thus, education has been negatively impacted due to low school attendance, lack of quality education, access to education, and availability. Due to a lack of expertise, teachers often used "learning by doing" or recreated the face-to-face approach, which may not deliver the same educational quality (Watermeyer et al., 2020). Thus, emergency teaching modes in the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be compared to well-designed online education processes. The system could lose significant organizational experience if technical issues cause senior teachers to depart (Hodges et al., 2020). The system could lose significant organizational experience if technical issues cause senior teachers to depart. There is also much trial and error, uncertainty, and ambiguity around online student exams in the UK. The closure of schools and colleges has impacted internal assessments and exams for public qualifications like GCSEs (UN, 2020). Similarly, despite the rapid use of online education, these closures impacted learning, exams, and the safety and legal status of international students in their host

countries. Perhaps most importantly, the crisis calls into question the educational value of a university degree that includes networking and social opportunities. Institutions will need to re-structure their learning environments such that digitalization broadens and complements student-teacher and other relationships (OECD, 2020). Online education has arisen as a remedy to this unprecedented global epidemic (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

4 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic provided educators with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the new normal. The findings contextualize the numerous experiences of teachers in a developing country like the Philippines, which were faced in the midst of a pandemic. As to their strengths, they worked with optimism, dedication, patience, and commitment. They also practiced collaboration and being resourceful as essential traits. Furthermore, they become innovative and they possess pedagogical skills, knowledge, and competence in the new normal. On the other hand, teachers experience difficulty while teaching in the new normal. They had difficulty monitoring, providing feedback, and assessing student learning. They struggled to communicate with students. They also considered the COVID-19 virus a potential threat in their workplace, and they considered the quality of education at risk. Despite these struggles and difficulties, they became technologically inclined 21st-century educators, and they were able to enhance their skills in module writing.

Thus, teaching in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic provided teachers' deficiencies in some course delivery; however, they worked diligently to transform and demonstrate resilience in teaching in the new normal amidst pandemics, converting them into strengths and opportunities. On the other hand, instructors' and professors' strengths should be recognized, and professional development opportunities should be provided to help them become more competent educators.

Moreover, the problems encountered by teachers could be considered as educational inputs. The university's administration should strengthen teacher support in all areas. Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight the essential need for additional research on educators' experiences throughout the pandemic. Again, extensive research into the types of training that would be most useful to both educators and learners, particularly in terms of technological and module use, is required. Additional significant research on various training methodologies, particularly the use of technology and modules, is necessary. Another area for research would be to look at the content modifications made by teachers in various fields of study to meet the requirements of flexible learning and the alignment of a project-based instructional curriculum with the principles of blended teaching and learning in comprehensive detail. These are just a number of the potential avenues for future investigation, as there are a multitude of opportunities for further investigation. Finally, proper dissemination of the study's findings to the administration could help teachers cope with the new normal.

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