Teachers Stress: A Narrative Inquiry during COVID-19 Pandemic

ALMA T. GURREA*

Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines
*Corresponding author: ocgurrea.alm@gmail.com

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Abstract This study aimed to explore the teacher's stress among public and private colleges brought by the COVID-19 Pandemic which was identified in China last December 2019 and has spread around the world. The participants of the research consisted of 11 teachers in the public and 11 teachers in private schools. The data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis method and divided into themes, sub-themes, and codes. Revealed in the study was that teachers in the public and private tertiary schools experience stress from the different demands at work, specifically on workload in terms of number of classes online per day, the number of students in the Google classroom for large classes, number of hours spent online in correcting students activities and outputs. The fact that teachers need a strong support system now more than ever and it is important to stay positive and reflect on what the teachers can learn during this time about instructional innovation and transformation. Besides, recommendations have been put forward that online teaching will be effectively implemented shortly along with teachers’ significant training. Teachers have had to deal with symptoms and causes of psychological issues from the start of the pandemic. The lockdown and the travel restrictions changed the dimensions of the teaching profession, as schools had to close to deal with the threat of the pandemic. The teaching situation, therefore, has been grim over the years with less focus on how it affects the teachers. This study, therefore, used a sample of 22 teachers from public and private schools to select teachers from all sides of the teaching sector. They were given a questionnaire, which helped to determine and measure anxiety, stress, and depression. The outcome and discussion proved that teachers have indeed suffered from the pandemic and show a high percentage of stress and depression. There are however other variables such as job stability, which formed the basis for including both private and public college teachers, age, and gender of the teachers. This paper advocates for the protection and safeguarding of the teachers' mental welfare and helps maintain the standards and quality of teaching for the benefit of the students and the teachers.

Keywords: teachers stress, online learning, COVID-19

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1. Introduction

During the first months of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected school activities all over the world, including the Philippines. Thus, CHED called for an urgent need to explore other innovative learning modalities that will facilitate migration from traditional to flexible teaching and learning options. Experts say that the sudden shift, forced adoption of technology-delivered instruction will affect the well-being of faculty and students alike [1]. With this, teachers with no experience working online abruptly shifted all the teaching-learning to the new modality causes stress as confirmed in the previous study that both teaching and managing are already in the category of occupations reporting the highest stress levels [2]. Stress in a distance-learning course can be minimized by course design and by appropriate adaptation to present situations. There is little, however, in the literature on distance learning, that deals with perceived stress in teachers. Simpson [3] is one of the few writers who discussed stress concerning distance learning–but only does so in the general discussion of stress management, rather than the investigation of teachers stress that the present researcher aimed to examine qualitatively the college teachers stress and seek to understand how their experiences influence and impacts the commitment of teaching.

In the advent of the modern world, the teacher is engaged with the continuous change of curriculum and educational reforms, updating of teaching methodology, the rapid unfolding of technology, and the increased of social aggressiveness which made the role of a teacher more complex and diverse. Teaching has been described as one of the most stressful, exhausting, and difficult of all occupations [4,5] and emotionally demanding, [6], with the hazards of heavy workloads and performance demands which can impair one’s physical and psychological well-being [7]. This results in the teacher’s stress. The coronavirus pandemic has altered the world as we knew it. The new restrictions have changed the way
people interact especially in the education sector and social relationships. The result of these changes has been feelings of loneliness and isolation. The high rate of transmission has had significant economic, social, psychological, and health effects that have affected the whole globe. The closure of schools was an immediate outcome of the pandemic and the struggle to resume normalcy is still a challenge for most countries. Certain countries are working on the return of students to the classrooms and the teachers are expected to be responsible for this process and make the transition as smooth as possible. Research on the negative effects of significant disruptions in society on the well-being of educators. There is a high likelihood of significant effects on the teachers as the effects of Covid-19 rage on. Even though such a major event has not been experienced by humanity in recent times, there is a need to understand how it affects people in the education sector. There also remains a significant threat, as there are more strains of the various springing from various regions in the world and therefore warranting the need for a study on how the effects on teachers can be controlled. The aim of this paper is to identify the exact elements of the teacher experience during the pandemic and the nature of the impacts on the teachers.

Moreover, meta-analytical research on teacher burnout encompassed fifteen years of published and unpublished studies from January 2000 to January 2015 whose participants were from the rural or urban elementary, middle and secondary schools. The result indicated a positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, and student behavior [8].

The issue of stress and burnout has been an alarming phenomenon globally. It is assumed that the 21st century gave birth to the emergence of educational transformation; as such, schools set new goals, broadened the curriculum to compete globally to suit diverse learners and skills. Today, students live in a modern society that is interconnected in preparing them to be more competitive. To this change, classrooms should be healthy, safe, engaged, and supported. School administrators, parents, educators, and community members, must have the ability to meet challenges and share strengths.

In terms of responsibility towards student’s welfare and well-being, teaching is a unique profession. It is regarded as one of the world’s top ten most stressful professions [9]. Teachers encountered various stressors, such as workload, role overload, insufficient salary, students discipline; however, the main problem occurs when teachers’ capacities are not sufficient in fulfilling the workplace demands, such that these stressors may eventually lead to job burnout. Studies have shown that teaching is a stressful task and almost one-fourth of teachers have stress during teaching. Western countries and the east of Europe, instructors have stress which influences self-well-being and execution. From an organizational point of view, stress can translate an ineffective behavior [14], such as estrangement, unresponsiveness, and tranquility.

McCormick and Bernett [15] hypothesize comparative to the study of Proulx [16] the connections between stress and burnout dimensions to arbitrarily chosen high schools in New South Wales, Australia utilizing established instruments of Maslach Burnout Inventory. The discoveries see that stress and burnout as an overwhelmingly psychological phenomenon.

Researchers carried out with people and animals show that long-term stress causes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems [17]. In addition to stress resources, teachers and schools also affect stress situations seriously. According to Jones [18], the stress level of children and adolescents depends on the time, which students spend at school and academic activities. Educational stress is also called academic stress and is defined as discomfort and anxiety that is caused by different troubles of the academic learning experience [19]. Verma and Gupta [20] stated that academic stress is a disappointment about academic failure and mental distress that is characterized by a fear of being unsuccessful. Academic stress causes substance use, unhealthy nutrition, and depression; and affects self-care skills negatively [21,22]. According to the study of the American Health Association that was carried out with 97,357 students in 2006, 32 percent of students consider educational stress as a reason for low grades and dropout [23]. High expectations, information overload, academic pressure, unrealistic ambitions, limited opportunities, and high competition are the most common causes of academic stress [24].

Recent studies show that the earliest effects of the pandemic on the teachers were sleep disturbance, stress anxiety because they had to use the internet as a medium of teaching. Other studies also show that there are cases of anxiety related to the use of ICT in work and the completion of jobs. It leads to decreased job satisfaction and fatigue among the users especially at a time when it is the only tool available for instructors. There are also other highlighted variables such as age, which determine how the pandemic affected the teachers. Teachers who had children were also identified as more vulnerable to the increased stress of having to work from home. The studies show that the teachers who were the most affected were young female teachers with children and people with chronic illnesses.
Educational stress decreases performance, poses a threat to student's well-being, and causes mental and physical health problems [25]. Lack of self-confidence, somatization disorders, suicide ideation, the negative sense of self are the situations that are derived from educational stress [26]. Perceived stress differs according to variables such as gender, cultural differences, and socioeconomic status. Researchers indicate that male students experience less educational stress than female students [27]. This finding typically can be because female students pay more attention to school performance and they are more worried about academic failure [28]. Students, who have a disadvantaged history as compared to their peers, experience more educational stress [29].

The researcher has observed signs of stress among teachers like irritability towards work and other tasks, loss of enthusiasm, and decreased participation to whatever causes that may be detrimental to an underlying commitment to the Commission on Higher Education-Quality Education. The present phenomenon could be associated with the teaching and task-related demands of the school that teachers are engaged with.

To minimize the impact of demands among teachers, this present study aimed to explore the teacher's stress during COVID 19 pandemic. The study looks into the experience of stress by teachers during the COVID 19 pandemic and other significant events that may occur in the course of their journey. The outcome of this study may serve as the basis for addressing the phenomenon being explored.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the teachers’ stress among public and private colleges brought by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What are the effects of the pandemic on teachers?
2. What factors contribute to the rise in stress among teachers during the pandemic?
3. How are teachers coping to keep up with the demands and stresses of online teaching?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study, which examined the stress creators is a qualitative research based on the narrative inquiry. This study utilized a narrative inquiry design. A Narrative inquiry is the study of experience understood narratively. It is a way of thinking about and studying, experience. Narrative inquirers think narratively about the experience throughout inquiry [30]. The narrative inquiry was used to gain access to the public and private college teachers' stress during the pandemic. According to the definition of [30], the story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his/her life may be going.

2.2. Research Participants and Sampling

The sample of this research was determined by using purposive sampling as the method of recruiting participants. The population of the research consisted of 11 teachers in the public and 11 teachers in private tertiary schools, the academic year 2020-21. Inclusion criteria of the sample size may include factors such as gender, ages between 23-65 years old, type of school, job status, and home location. The difference by teachers in public and private schools is used due to the difference in infrastructure by the institutions and variability in job stability.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedure

The narratives were collected through interview forms. Semi-structured forms allow for fast coding and analysis of data, ease of measurement, and then allow comparisons with the scope of the research [31].

Informed consent was presented and signed by the participants about the general aim of the research, the anonymity of responses, and the voluntary nature of participation and signed informed consent. No incentive was given. The identity of the participants would be kept confidential and their answers would only be used for scientific purposes. Pet names were used instead of the real names of the participants. Accordingly, teachers were coded as private teacher 1 (PrT1), private teacher 2 (PrT2) public teacher 1 (PuT1) and, public teacher 2 (PuT2).

2.4. Data Analysis

The research data obtained were analyzed by the content analysis method, which is frequently used in qualitative research methods. Content analysis is a method that is effective in classification, edition, and comparison of texts to make theoretical inferences [32]. The data required for content analysis was analyzed with Google Sheets. The answers were evaluated in detail by the researchers and codes reflecting the experiences of the participants were created. Then, related codes were grouped and themes and sub-themes were created. Finally, the process was concluded by interpreting the themes and codes associated with each other.

2.5. Measures to Ensure Rigor

Büyüköztürk et al. [31] suggest that data should be examined by more than one person to increase the validity of qualitative research and member checking should be performed for reliability. Member checking, also known as participant or respondent validation, is a technique for exploring the credibility of results. Data or results were returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. For this reason, two researchers to ensure the validity of the research examined the data. Besides, the analyses were supported by the direct experiences of the participants.
3. Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the pandemic on the mental health of teachers. It focuses on the role of stressors and identifies these factors in relation to teachers. It focuses on the results from the questionnaire to highlight how various factors affect the teachers. The paper proceeds to highlight the demands placed on teachers during the pandemic that may lead to stress. The effects of stress on the teachers are similarly highlighted to find how the teachers are having to cope with the pandemic. It continues to highlight how teachers find the motivations to ensure that they continue their work regardless of the state of things. The findings show that the teachers are affected by both issues in their personal lives for having to work from home and professional issues related to the demands and requirements of the profession. Teachers have had to shift from the traditional form of instruction to the modern technological method used during the pandemic.

The Instruction division is significantly influenced by the widespread. Numerous schools around the world have briefly closed to control the spread of the COVID-19. The investigation appears that teachers' stress amid pandemics and online learning isn’t isolated from each other. A few instructors are not fulfilled with the unused learning mode. The educator includes a large share in providing an intelligent environment for the students to get involved within the learning environment [33].

Emerged in the study are four major themes, with subthemes in some of them, that are reflective of the experiences of the participants. Discussed below are the emerged themes:

**Theme 1. Stress Creators**

The ongoing pandemic has created a great impact on people from all across the globe. Many have suffered and experienced changes in their day-to-day lives. Among these are the teachers in any learning institution. With this occurrence, the educational system was modified drastically in response to the need to continue educating the students using an alternative teaching-learning modality. With this, teachers have the burden of creating learning materials that will ensure effective facilitating the learning of students through alternative means. Some of the participants expressed their concerns on this matter as reflected in their responses below:

**Sub-theme 1. Personal Family Issues**

Participants’ personal/family issues show that some teachers have financial constraints or limited family income. These teachers are dependent only on the teaching salary for daily needs because the husbands were laid-off in their job during the pandemic.

The statement of participants PrT4, PuT2, and PrT7 regarding this are as follows:

*I only received a lesser rate considering my few years, yet in the institution. As a remedy, I sold some lightly used items to my friends, colleagues, and relatives.*

*My eye problem has gotten worse when spending much of my time on the laptop screen, sometimes my eyes dried and sometimes tears fell down, and noticed it when it’s already in my mouth.* Another participant PrT7 said that he experiences lately blurry eyesight and pointing that the cause is his overexposure on screen.

**Sub-theme 2. School Issues**

The New normal way of teaching-learning, dependent on online technology and the use of technology identified by some participants as stress creators. The findings show that this school issue is associated with problems related to other codes like difficulty in connecting with students, students don't have suitable equipment like laptops, and computer inefficiency, and illiteracy of teachers and students. Due to a pandemic, this current educational structure is a complete alternative, but there is a problem with technical issues since teachers are not used to it. There are numerous studies within the literature appearing that there’s a negative relationship between online instruction and resistance to online instruction [34]. According to Palloff and Pratt [35], technology alone isn’t adequate in distance instruction.

**Sub-theme 3. Environmental/School Issues**

The research findings also include the environmental and social issues sub-theme which comprise nine codes. Eleven participants indicated that the following were stressful: unstable network in certain regions, intermittent signal, poor Internet connection, or fluctuation. Another group of participants does not have Internet access at home, the work environment is not conducive. The PrT3 participant is residing in the hinterland and she said:

*I am 15 years in service and not used to this system of teaching that’s why I find it difficult adjusting, especially that I need to go to my relative’s place in the downtown area for internet connectivity.*

The PuT17 states that she is afraid of COVID transmission, neighbors infected by the virus, and the so-called quarantine issues because this could hamper some of her daily tasks especially the demand of time in teaching.

**Theme 2: Demands that Contribute to Stress**

The theme of demands that contribute to stress is divided into two sub-themes: school tasks and requirements and students' and parents' concerns. Analysis of teachers' demands shows that school tasks and requirements are more demanding than the student's and parents' concerns.

As a result of the analyses, a total of 37 codes was identified, twenty-six in the school tasks and requirements and twelve in the students and parents concerns sub-theme.

**Sub-theme 1: School Tasks and Requirements**

Some of the teachers express their feelings as follows: PrT9 "It is very stressful that we urged to comply with hard copies of the requirements where we find difficulty in traveling due to some protocols to follow and harmful too for our health... .", PuT13 “I’m tired of constantly monitoring students’ submission online at any time because others are working for school expenses like loads,
Teachers are still searching for internet connectivity.” Teachers went through difficult times in this process, both emotionally and psychologically.

**Sub-theme 2: Students and Parents Concerns**

The other demand that contributes to teachers’ stress is the students’ and parents’ concerns. The parents’ (of the students) complaints and when you extend an effort to reach out to your student yet they took it for granted according to some participants. The demands that contribute to the stress mentioned were evaluated by the participants from different perspectives. For example, PrT6 though it's tedious in contacting and monitoring students especially those who don't have an internet connection and gadget, there's a feeling of touching the heart of my students...” PrT17 it's so irritating to always repeat the guidelines and instructions to some parents who can't easily understand through short message service, personal message or even calls. PuT16 “we are advised not to take students' attendance as long as students can comply with requirements”. Attendance is an important factor for follow-up students’ difficulties.

**Theme 3: Effects of Stress**

The theme of the effects of stress experienced by the teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic was observed. Teacher stress impacts teachers’ health and Well-being. It is clear that most of the effects of stress on this theme, which consists of six codes in total, are related to health.

Codes obtained with this theme are teachers’ poor performance, burnout, lack of engagement, and tiredness, students showed lower academic performance when teachers are highly stressed and others will resort to transfer to another kind of job or institution. In this regard, PrT20 stated that “I'm not ready for this present situation, its a 360 degree turn around and the reality is here like I'm not so capable of using computer-related activities or lack of technology skills, can't easily understand the technology training maybe because of my age, easily get tired of conducting the class. I still prefer the face-to-face classes.” The case that teachers and students are physically absent limits interaction and lower the efficiency level. This online instruction will be a crucial show in the future, but a few instructors specified that this will be as viable as face-to-face instruction.

**Theme 4. Motivations and Reasons that Influence the Teachers to Continue Teaching**

The theme of motivations and reasons that influence the teachers to continue teaching consists of forty-three codes. Some teachers' motivations and reasons that influence them to continue teaching are their career or profession. Teaching is their chosen career, thus, they remain committed to serving the school in achieving its vision and mission. PrT20 said, “teaching is my bread and butter that motivates me to stay until this 20th year now”. PuT6 “Despite different challenges in this profession, I still remain positive because of my love for teaching. PuT3 expressed” that teaching is the most tiring profession, but enjoyable and rewarding.” Considering the different themes mentioned in general, it is a remarkable finding that teachers are really stressed this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**4. Conclusion/Recommendation**

Teachers highlighted online teaching as more stressful. Teachers in the public and private tertiary schools experience stress from the different demands at work, specifically on workload in terms of number of classes online per day, number of students in the Google classroom for large classes, number of hours spent online in correcting students activities and outputs. This as well includes personal and family issues, school issues and environmental and social issues, and parents and administrative demand. Due to these demands, a decrease amount of time was experienced by the teachers to accomplish the teaching-related activity. This precipitates moderate exhaustion and fatigue among teachers.

Teachers have a critical role in children’s lives and teaching has become one of the most stressful occupations, with alarmingly high rates of job dissatisfaction.

In general, to overwork, the teachers with inadequate time and training for the new normal education system for compliance do not give the best output. Also, giving the assignment beyond the nature of their task makes them less efficient. The closure of schools and the disruption of the learning process have led to the teachers feeling confused and stressed. They are unaware of the direction and how long things will remain as they are currently. A major cause of the uncertainty and stress is the fact that the teachers have significantly lower knowledge of the new technology required to teach during the pandemic.

An intervention is made available to minimize the stress experienced by the public and private tertiary school teachers. Social support is called for from colleagues and administration making the intervention a success. Training can be carried out so that instructors can adjust to an internet framework more can be reinforced to dispense with technological issues.

Teachers’ development plan of the school must include activities that will give a diversion to the stressful routine of the teachers. From the finding, it is critical to establish emotional support for teachers given the extent of the impact of the pandemic on their mental health. Teachers have had to cope with the pandemic by dealing with the stressors they face both at home and professionally. There are factors like age, gender, family status, and fears of job stability that also contribute to the stress of the teachers.

The paper proceeds to highlight the demands placed on teachers during the pandemic that may lead to stress. The effects of stress on the teachers are similarly highlighted to find how the teachers are having to cope with the pandemic. It continues to highlight how teachers find the motivations to ensure that they continue their work regardless of the state of things. The findings show that the teachers are affected by both issues in their personal lives for having to work from home and professional issues related to the demands and requirements of the profession. Teachers have had to shift from the traditional form of instruction to the modern technological method used during the pandemic.
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