



Lived experiences of teachers on the full implementation of in-person classes

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored teachers' experiences during the full implementation of in-person classes at Ibajay Central School in the Academic Year 2022-2023. Seven teachers shared their challenges and coping strategies through face-to-face interviews. Key findings revealed that physical and psychological readiness were essential for overcoming challenges and maintaining teaching effectiveness. Teachers were eager to return but also felt anxious about the virus, highlighting the need for robust psychological support. The study emphasized the importance of infrastructural preparedness and identified strict health protocols and increased workloads as significant obstacles. To address these issues, differentiated learning and regular parent-teacher conferences were recommended to better support student progress and teacher well-being.

Keywords: *phenomenological study, in-person classes, teachers lived experiences, challenges and coping mechanism*

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Introduction

Teachers' experiences with the full implementation of in-person classes reflect a mix of challenges and opportunities. They face difficulties adjusting teaching methods to diverse learning styles, managing larger class sizes, and effectively integrating technology into the curriculum. Despite these hurdles, teachers find satisfaction in increased student engagement and deeper understanding of the material. However, adapting to new educational paradigms and dealing with administrative pressures highlight the need for continuous professional development and support. After two years of modular and blended learning, teachers now struggle with students' behavior, reading and writing skills, and numeracy. Balancing school duties, training, and family responsibilities also poses significant challenges.

This study focused on identifying the challenges and coping mechanisms of teachers at Ibajay Central School during the transition to full in-person classes and proposed an intervention program to help address these issues. This study specifically sought to evaluate the lived experiences of the teachers on the full implementation of in-person classes, the challenges they encountered and the coping mechanisms in addressing the problem.

Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological research design to explore the firsthand experiences of teachers during the full implementation of in-person classes at Ibajay Central School in Aklan. Phenomenology, as described by Barrow (2017) and supported by Cridland et al. (2014) and Meadan et al. (2010), focuses on how individuals construct and make sense of their experiences. Vagle (2014) highlights its interpretive and flexible nature, allowing deep engagement with the phenomenon. Ibajay Central School, situated in Ibajay, Aklan, has 1,144 learners, 45 teachers, and 2 utility workers, spread across three compounds. Seven teachers, who faced challenges during the transition to in-person classes, were selected through purposive sampling as the study's main participants. Data collection was conducted using a researcher-developed interview guide, validated by a panel of four experts in relevant fields. The guide consisted of three parts: lived experiences; challenges; and coping mechanisms.

The data gathering process involved obtaining necessary permissions and participants' consent. Face-to-face interviews, lasting 40-50 minutes, were recorded with participant

permission, adhering to health protocols. Post-interview, data was handled with strict confidentiality.

The researcher analyzed the data through a process of familiarization, identification of significant statements, and bracketing pre-suppositions to focus on the phenomenon. Meanings were clustered into common themes, leading to the development of an exhaustive description of the phenomenon. This description was then condensed into a fundamental structure statement, which was returned to participants for verification, ensuring accuracy and incorporating any necessary modifications based on their feedback.

The researcher secured consent, coordinated with involved parties, conducted orientations, used pseudonyms for participants, and ensured confidentiality in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Findings

During the full return to in-person classes, teachers' experiences highlighted five key themes. First, the importance of physical and psychological readiness was emphasized, with holistic health being crucial for enhancing teaching performance. Second, the role of administrators in ensuring infrastructural preparedness, particularly for reopening schools post-COVID-19, was underscored. Third, while teachers viewed the return as a fresh start with potential for productivity and meaningful learning, there was also prevalent anxiety about the virus, reflecting concerns for self-protection. Fourth, several challenges emerged, including the strict observation of health protocols, exhausting teaching preparations, and a decline in student learning. These protocols impacted communication, delayed daily goals, and caused stress, affecting both teachers and students. The pandemic's shift to alternative education modes led to learning gaps and competency disparities among students. Finally, teachers adopted various coping mechanisms, such as differentiated learning, parent-teacher conferencing, and effective coping strategies, which helped maintain resilience and meaningful routines.

To support teachers, an intervention program titled "Vigouring The Teaching and Learning Practices Amidst the Pandemic" was proposed. This program aims to redefine teaching practices, discuss COVID-19's impact on education, update strategies for the new normal, provide tips for

physical and mental fitness, strengthen spiritual well-being, and share experiences related to the challenges of in-person classes.

Conclusion

The study's findings underscore several key implications and recommendations for teachers navigating the full implementation of in-person classes. Teachers encountered various challenges, including concerns about physical and psychological readiness, anxiety over virus transmission, and the excitement of reuniting with colleagues and students. Despite these difficulties, they demonstrated resilience by employing coping strategies such as differentiated instruction, parent-teacher conferences, and creative problem-solving. This experience not only strengthened their problem-solving abilities but also enhanced their passion and productivity, which they viewed as essential for overcoming potential obstacles. Teachers recognized that their dedication to teaching and commitment to students played a crucial role in bridging the gaps caused by the pandemic's disruptions.

In the light of the findings, this study recommends teachers to prioritize their holistic well-being by maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet and adequate sleep. Flexibility and adaptability are also vital, as teachers must be prepared to adjust their teaching strategies in response to changes in the learning environment. Additionally, creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for students is essential, with teachers recognizing the diverse needs of learners and establishing clear expectations and routines. Regular and open communication with both students and parents is crucial for fostering strong relationships and addressing potential issues. Finally, ongoing professional development focused on mental health and stress management is recommended to help teachers combat stress and maintain mental wellness. These actions will not only enhance teachers' resilience but also contribute positively to the overall educational system and its stakeholders.

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