

Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During the Covid-19 Pandemic

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15171664

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Abstract:

The study examined the challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in a district of Bindoy, Division of Negros Oriental, as a basis for an intervention plan for the 2021-2022 school year. A total of 37 respondents were surveyed and classified by age, civil status, income, and plantilla position using a descriptive research design with statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, and the Mann-Whitney U test. Findings revealed that most respondents were older, married, low-income earners, and held lower plantilla positions. Teachers experienced a "moderate degree" of difficulty in workload, technology use, and relationships with learners, peers, and superiors. When grouped by demographic factors, the degree of difficulty remained moderate across all areas. No significant differences were found in workload and technology-related difficulties among groups, but a significant difference was observed in relationship-related difficulties when grouped by age, though not by civil status, income, or plantilla position. Based on these findings, an intervention plan was developed.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, difficulties encountered, teachers.

Introduction:

Nature of the Problem

The public health emergency brought about by COVID-19 calls for the Department of Education (DepEd) to be innovative and resourceful in delivering quality, accessible, relevant, and liberating education. In response to this emergency, DepEd developed the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to ensure that learning opportunities are provided to our learners in a safe manner, through different learning delivery. The Department of Education (DepEd) issued policy guidelines for the provision of learning resources. It also establishes the guidelines on the release, utilization, and liquidation of support funds for the printing and delivery of self-learning modules and other learning resources (DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2020).

Onset of the implementation, teachers face various difficulties under the current normal education system. These difficulties are the heavy workload in the planning, preparing, and distributing modules, monitoring students' learning, checking and evaluating outputs; lack of skills in the use of technology; and how to reach out to learners, colleagues, superiors, and stakeholders. Teachers expressed disappointment while in the production of modules. Some teachers are even being made to report to school as late as 11:00 pm in their school to finish the printing on time (Manlipot, 2020).

The researcher personally observed and experienced difficulties while performing the duties and responsibilities of a teacher. Teachers usually go home late every day just to finish the printing, collating, and organizing of learning modules for all subject areas. There were teachers caught off guard by the lack of distant education expertise as well as computer literacy. In addition, some teachers find it difficult in reaching out the parents and learners for important announcements related to modular distance learning.

Because of this scenario, the researcher as a tenured public elementary school educator and the head teacher was motivated to determine the degree of difficulties encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic as a basis for crafting an intervention plan. The results of this study will be significant for teachers to have a strong commitment and stay motivated to teach and work despite the pandemic.

Current State of Knowledge

The COVID-19 pandemic forced school closures worldwide, exacerbating challenges in education and intensifying stress among educators. Already facing pressures from students, families, and evolving systems, teachers now encounter increased anxiety and uncertainty. Supporting teachers in adapting to new teaching methods, particularly remote learning, is crucial to ensure their professional growth and overall well-being. As schools transition out of

lockdown, recognizing teachers' efforts and including them in discussions about future educational reforms can lead to a more resilient and supportive system. The crisis highlights the long-overlooked contributions of educators and the need for sustainable support mechanisms.

Teachers face significant challenges in integrating technology into education, as many struggle with limited ICT skills, resistance to change, and inadequate infrastructure (Simbulan, 2020). A lack of confidence in using digital tools, coupled with poor technical and administrative support, further hinders technology adoption. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified these difficulties, requiring educators to adapt to various learning modalities while managing increased responsibilities and personal hardships (Cho et al., 2021). Additionally, insufficient guidance in distance learning and the need for psycho-social support have added to their burden, making professional development through remote modalities essential. Teacher workload also affects job satisfaction and efficiency, with some educators handling both academic and ancillary functions, increasing their stress levels (Embang et al., 2022). Addressing these issues through targeted training, institutional support, and improved ICT policies is crucial for fostering effective technology-driven education.

Teachers' workload consists of Direct Teaching Contact (DTC) and Ancillary/Administrative Assignments (AAA), with the latter varying in intensity based on the time required (Embang et al., 2022). Public school teachers in the Philippines are often overworked, handling administrative tasks beyond their teaching duties, including paperwork, training, and disaster response efforts (Esguerra, 2018). The demanding nature of teaching, coupled with frequent reforms and administrative requirements, contributes to burnout and job-related stress (Jomoad et al., 2021). The shift to the new normal learning system further intensified these challenges, requiring teachers to integrate educational technology, design online content, and adapt to digital assessment tools (Juanda et al., 2021; Gepila Jr., 2020). Creating and managing digital resources demands expertise, adding to their workload (Mugot et al., 2019; Ramos et al., 2020). Additionally, teachers must address student motivation, discipline, time constraints, and evolving evaluation standards, all within often unsatisfactory working conditions (Jomoad et al., 2021).

Studies on the challenges faced by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic reveal significant struggles with technology, infrastructure, and preparedness for distance learning. Diana et al. (2020) found that elementary teachers faced issues with students' technological access, parental involvement, and inadequate facilities, while Ujianti (2020) highlighted unstable internet, high costs, and student disengagement. Sari and Nayir (2020) reported that most teachers lacked training and experience in distance education, making online transitions difficult. Tosun et al. (2021) noted that older and female teachers, particularly in rural areas, faced greater IT-related challenges. Additionally, Buddhadasa et al. (2020) found that a lack of English proficiency and online teaching training lowered teacher satisfaction, while Ozudogru (2021) pointed out difficulties faced by pre-service teachers, including technical issues and poor communication. Across these studies, a common theme emerges: inadequate digital resources, insufficient training, and the abrupt shift to online learning placed immense strain on teachers, underscoring the urgent need for IT support and professional development.

Studies on the experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight significant challenges, stressors, and coping mechanisms. Robosa et al. (2021) found that public school teachers faced difficulties such as lack of resources, student management issues, and overwhelming workloads, leading to stress and burnout. Teachers struggled to adapt to digital learning due to limited resources, yet they found ways to cope through effective communication and support. Similarly, Gumarang Jr. (2021) revealed that private school teachers faced financial constraints, mental health issues, excessive workloads, and a lack of government support, calling for financial aid and policy reforms. Castroverde (2021) focused on the challenges of modular distance learning, where teachers had to adapt their planning, module distribution, and student monitoring despite limited resources. Teachers coped by managing time efficiently, adopting innovative strategies, and equipping themselves with new skills. Aviles et al. (2021) reinforced the importance of school support in developing effective learning materials, concluding that teacher effectiveness in modular learning was not determined by demographic factors but by perseverance and resilience.

Further, Carreon et al. (2021) examined the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and remote teaching burnout, finding that teachers had a high level of fear and a moderate level of burnout. Their study indicated that while fear of COVID-19 did not significantly vary across demographics, burnout levels were higher among those with lower incomes, less teaching experience, and lower educational attainment. A positive correlation between fear and burnout was identified, emphasizing the need for educational authorities to address teachers' psychological well-being. Across these studies, it is evident that teachers—both in public and private schools—faced considerable challenges in adapting to new teaching modalities, requiring institutional support, policy interventions, and mental health considerations to ensure their well-being and effectiveness in education.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is anchored on the Gestalt Theory by Wertheimer (1959).

Gestalt Theory provides the basis on how a person approach the difficulties encountered. Every person has its own style in dealing with problems. How people represent a problem in their mind and also how solving a problem involves reorganization or reconstructing of this representation. The success in solving a problem is influenced by how it is represented in the person's mind. According to Wertheimer, "the essence of successful problem-solving behavior is being able to see the overall structure of the problem. When an individual tries to solve a problem, his or her communicative activeness increases in three domains of communication action: information acquisition, selection, and transmission.

As linked in the present study, teachers encountered various difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. Gestalt theory provides teachers with the idea of how they handle difficulties positively. By understanding the difficulties and recognizing problems he/she therefore can find a solution. So that the teacher remains responsible for carrying out their duties and achieving learning objectives and goals. Teachers facilitate the transfer of learning from the experiential activity to the real world, structure the process of reflection to derive the most learning from the experience and ensure that the learning outcomes are reached. Because of the pandemic, teachers' well-being was affected by the immediate change in the educational system. However, teachers always find a way to change or adapt according to the situation and prevailing conditions of the environment. Although some teachers are late responding to changes in the new educational set-up still they try their best to cope with the present teaching situation.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to determine the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in one of the districts, in a large-sized schools Division, in Central Philippines during the school year 2021-2022 as basis for an intervention plan. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: 1) the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic according to the area of workload, use of technology and relationship with learners, peers and superiors; and 2) the significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic when grouped and compared according to aforementioned variables.

Methodology:

This section presents the research design, locale of the study, respondents of the study, research instrument, validity, reliability, data gathering procedure, and data analysis.

Research Design

Descriptive research design was used to determine the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in one of the districts, in a large-sized schools Division, in Central Philippines during the school year 2021-2022 as basis for an intervention plan. According to Nachimas and De Ward (2015), descriptive research is fact-finding with adequate interpretation. It is something more and beyond just data-gathering; the latter is not reflective thinking nor research. It describes and interprets what it is, It is concerned with conditions of relationships that exist; practices and beliefs, a process that is going on; effects that are being felt, or trends that are developing. Descriptive research design was appropriate for the study as to know the present condition, the effects that are being felt, the prevailing issues and difficulties encountered by teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic and to make adequate and accurate interpretation of the data.

Study Respondents

The respondents of the study were the 37 teachers in the hinterland schools in one of the districts. Purposive sampling was utilized. Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of population to participate in the study. Researchers use purposive sampling when they want to access a particular subset of people, as all participants of a survey are selected because they fit a particular profile (Ames, 2019).

Instruments

The study utilized the researcher-made questionnaire. Part 1 focused on the Personal Information includes the age, civil status, average family monthly income, and plantilla position of the respondents and Part 2 will be the degree of difficulties encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The instrument was divided into three areas and each area is composed of ten questions. Each part of the questionnaire required the participants to read the items and simply mark the preferred option, except for the first part related to their personal information. The respondents will respond (5) always, (4) often, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, (1) almost never. The research instrument was subjected to validity (4.48-excellent) and reliability (0.988-excellent). All of them were interpreted as worthy and good; respectively.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher asked permission through written communication from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Negros Oriental requesting to allow the researcher to distribute the questionnaires to the target respondents.

After granting the permission the researcher distributed the survey questionnaire to each respondent. The purpose of the study was properly explained to respondents by the researcher. The researcher gave the respondents an allowance of four weeks to ensure that all items in the questionnaires are answered. The questionnaires were personally retrieved by the researcher after the allowed time was through to ensure a 100 percent retrieval of the checklist and questionnaires.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Objective No. 1 used a descriptive-analytical scheme and mean to determine the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during Covid-19 pandemic.

Objective No. 2 utilized, a comparative analytical scheme and Mann Whitney U test to determine whether there is a significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during Covid-19 pandemic when they are grouped and compared according to profile variables.

Ethical Consideration

Research ethics protocol must be followed in conducting any type of research to make sure that no human rights are violated, and research being conducted has no hidden agenda (Bhasin, 2020). To ensure the protection of the participants of the study, the researcher gave importance to the respondents' voluntary participation, informed consent, risk of harm, confidentiality, and anonymity.

In this study, for voluntary participation, the researcher asked to sign or agree to a consent form by filling out a blank line/data entry slot with respondents' initials or an alias. After they sign or agree to the consent form, they are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. For informed consent, the research ensures that the respondents are fully informed about the procedures and risks involved in the research and must give their consent to participate. For risk of harm, the researcher did not put participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm because of their participation. If should this happens, the participants can decline to answer or all the questions and may withdraw their participation at any time. For confidentiality, the researcher guaranteed the participants identifying information will not be made available to anyone who is not directly involved in the study. Further, for anonymity of the respondents, the respondents used alias or initial to keep his/her identity anonymous to the researcher and other participants.

Results and Discussion:

This section deals with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data gathered to carry out the objectives of this study. All these were made possible by following certain appropriate procedures so as to give the exact data and solution to each specific problem.

Table 1

Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Workload

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a teacher, I have encountered difficulties in. .</i>		
1. performing effectively because of the various workload and new teaching modalities.	2.86	Moderate Degree
2. sleeping at night worrying of the unfinished production of the self-learning modules.	3.05	Moderate Degree
3. making decisions properly because of the heavy workload and ancillary tasks in school.	2.76	Moderate Degree
4. performing other physical activities because of the too much stress in school activities.	2.70	Moderate Degree
5. managing my eating habits and health condition because of the demand of work in school.	3.04	Moderate Degree
6. organizing and managing my time properly because of the volume of remote teaching activities, administrative and ancillary works.	2.51	Moderate Degree
7. doing my household chores because there are many important things to prioritize in school.	2.54	Moderate Degree
8. preparing and production of self-learning modules because has multiple subjects to handle.	2.62	Moderate Degree

9. distributing and retrieving of self-learning modules.	2.62	Moderate Degree
10. providing dedication to all my tasks because of too much workload and ancillary responsibilities.	2.59	Moderate Degree
Overall Mean	2.73	Moderate Degree

As presented in Table 1, the respondents assessed an overall mean score of 2.73 interpreted as a "moderate degree." It only shows that most of the teachers experienced moderate difficulties with their workload during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, if we go deeper in the analysis, the respondents assessed a highest mean score of 3.05 on item No. 2 which states "sleeping at night worrying of the unfinished production of the self-learning modules" interpreted as "moderate degree." On the other hand, the lowest mean of 2.51 was on item No. 6 which states "organizing and managing my time properly because of the volume of remote teaching activities, administrative and ancillary works" interpreted as "moderate degree."

This implies that a lot of teachers are exhausted because of the excessive workload. Most of their time was spent preparing, sorting, and production of self-learning modules. They are always worrying if they can finish the printing of modules on time. Added to this, there is a shortage of printing machines and printer ink in schools. Thus, most of the teachers take from their own pockets to finish the production of learning modules. Further, they also have additional ancillary assignments to perform that require them to submit reports at a short notice. This creates a system of prioritization on the part of the teacher which results in the piling of other responsibilities. Although they are facing problems and difficulties in line with their profession, they would rather make their selves busy to finish their work, duties, and responsibilities on time.

The result is supported by the study of Desouky and Allam (2017). Their study found that work overload is one of the factors causing burnout and lack of sleep among Egyptian teachers which causes reduced physical and emotional energy. Factors that cause exhaustion may include more extended hours of teaching and the need for ideal conditions that the workplace could not provide. There are times that the teaching work is negatively affected by burnout felt by the teachers. Teachers experience stress because of their workload, as they plan lessons, organize activities, develop curriculum, manage extra-curricular activities, supervise classes, provide information, maintain discipline, provide cover for teacher shortages and absences, maintain records, administer timetables, evaluate and assess student's performance, in addition to the motivation of students by words and actions.

Table 2
Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Use of Technology

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a teacher, I encountered difficulties in...</i>		
1. the use of word processing in preparing of the learning modules and other administrative work.	2.84	Moderate Degree
2. the use spreadsheets to record learners' performance and other school related reports.	2.89	Moderate Degree
3. the use PowerPoint presentation for online/blended learning, meetings and other school activities.	2.84	Moderate Degree
4. the use of google forms and the like in conducting online survey or examinations.	2.73	Moderate Degree
5. the use synchronous activities (google classroom, meet, Zoom, chat, etc) in facilitating class discussion and meetings.	2.81	Moderate Degree
6. performing digital skills such as browsing of educational portals, copying and downloading web documents to be used in the modular distance learning.	2.78	Moderate Degree
7. the use of ICT for conducting online/ blended learning instruction.	2.84	Moderate Degree
8. navigating the learning resources and materials in the LDRMS portal and DepEd commons.	2.49	Low Degree
9. performing troubleshooting because of the limited knowledge on ICT equipment and gadgets.	2.78	Moderate Degree
10. the use ICT to attend DepEd Webinars and other forms of seminars and trainings online to improve myself.	2.51	Moderate Degree
Overall Mean	2.75	Moderate Degree

The results in table 2 disclosed wherein the respondents assessed an overall mean score was 2.75 and interpreted it as a "moderate degree." This shows that most teachers encountered moderate difficulties in the use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If we investigate the results further, the respondents perceived a highest mean score of 2.89 on item No. 2 which states "the use spreadsheets to record learners' performance and other school-related reports" and interpreted as "moderate degree," while the lowest mean of 2.49 was on item No. 8 which states "navigating the learning resources and materials in the LDRMS portal and DepEd commons" interpreted as "low degree."

The results imply that some of the teachers lack the skills in the use of technology. Many of them have the difficulty in the use of spreadsheets, and PowerPoint and in conducting online/blended instructions. As a teacher, it is important to develop your self-awareness to improve or enhance your knowledge and skills in the changing educational needs of learners not only in teaching but also in ICT.

The result is supported by the claims of Pultoo et al, (2020). According to them, the use of technology in the new educational system is one of the difficulties felt by teachers. ICT utilization in teaching is a complex process that requires a preparedness to make learning more meaningful and fruitful. Teachers' preparedness to use ICT in education, becomes central and recognized as being a key element for the construction of useful pedagogical knowledge for practice, thus improving students' learning. On the other hand, teachers' acceptance of ICT in teaching also posited a large contribution to ICT integration in education.

Table 3

Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Relationship With Learners, Peers and Superiors

Items	Mean	Interpretation
<i>As a teacher, I encountered difficulties in...</i>		
1. interacting face-to-face with colleagues to get an emotional and technical support.	2.59	Moderate Degree
2. communicating personally the parents/guardians about self-learning module activities.	2.70	Moderate Degree
3. approaching school head and superiors for technical help related to remote teaching modalities because of health protocols to be followed.	2.65	Moderate Degree
4. interacting with the learners to know whether they understand the lessons in the self-learning modules.	2.76	Moderate Degree
5. conducting home visitation to follow up learners' progress because of the health risks.	2.59	Moderate Degree
6. going along with my colleagues and friends for a stress reliever activity.	2.57	Moderate Degree
7. benchmarking from to other schools to elicit and share best practices on modular distance learning.	2.73	Moderate Degree
8. encouraging the participation of stakeholders to school programs, projects and activities because of health risk issues.	2.81	Moderate Degree
9. attending trainings and workshops to enhance our teaching skills because of the health crisis.	2.78	Moderate Degree
10. conducting classroom PTA meeting because of the protocols to be followed.	2.78	Moderate Degree
Overall Mean	2.70	Moderate Degree

The results in table 3 revealed results wherein the respondents assessed an overall mean score was 2.70 and interpreted it as a "moderate degree." However, if we examine further the items, respondents assessed a highest mean score of 2.81 on item No. 8 which states "encouraging the participation of stakeholders to school programs, projects, and activities because of health risk issues" interpreted as "moderate degree." Whereas, the lowest mean of 2.57 was on item No. 6 which states "going along with my colleagues and friends for a stress reliever activity" interpreted as "moderate degree."

The results imply that most teachers encountered difficulties in their relationships with learners, peers, and superiors. Many of the teachers restrained from constant interaction with the learners, parents, peers, superiors, and stakeholders because of the health protocol to be followed. They had encountered difficulty to encourage stakeholders to participate in school programs, projects, and activities. This is because most of the stakeholders are also securing their safety from the COVID-19 virus, hence, they temporarily decline in participating in school activities.

Stakeholders' engagement and participation in school programs and activities during this COVID-19 pandemic is another significant factor that school heads and teachers need to observe. According to Neva (2018), effective stakeholder participation entails processes in which stakeholders have a meaningful influence on decisions, involving those who are potentially affected by or interested in a decision and who have a right to be involved in the decision-making process with special attention to those that may be marginalized and those that are directly affected by the implementation. The processes recognize and communicate the needs and interests of all stakeholders, involve stakeholders in defining how they participate, provide stakeholders with the information and capacity to participate, and communicate to stakeholders how their input affected the decisions.

Table 4

Difference in the Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Workload When Grouped According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	16	19.13	166.00	0.954	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	21	18.90				
Civil Status	Single	10	17.25	117.50	0.547	0.05	Not Significant
	Married	27	19.65				
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	20	18.10	152.00	0.581	0.05	Not Significant
	Higher	17	20.06				
Plantilla Position	Lower	21	16.64	118.50	0.127	0.05	Not Significant
	Higher	16	22.09				

As reflected in table 4, for variable age, the computed U is 166.0 with a *p*-value of 0.954 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of workload when they are grouped and compared according to age" is accepted.

In terms of variable civil status, the computed U is 117.5 with a *p*-value of 0.547 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of workload when they are grouped and compared according to civil status" is accepted.

On variable average family monthly income, the computed U is 152.0 with a *p*-value of 0.581 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of workload when they are grouped and compared according to average family monthly income" is accepted.

Further for variable plantilla position, the computed U is 118.5 with a *p*-value of 0.127 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of workload when they are grouped and compared according to plantilla position" is accepted.

This implies that the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the area of workload when they are grouped and compared according to age, civil status, average family monthly income, and plantilla position does not vary. This is because a majority of the teachers had experienced the same problems during the COVID-19 pandemic regardless of their age, civil status, average family monthly income, and plantilla position.

The result is supported by the study conducted by Montañó (2020), wherein there is no significant difference in the level of teachers' stress in the area of workload when they are compared according to age, civil status, and average family monthly income.

Table 5

Difference in the Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Use of Technology When Grouped According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	16	19.53	159.50	0.792	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	21	18.60				
Civil Status	Single	10	18.80	133.00	0.945	0.05	Not Significant

	Married	27	19.07			
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	20	18.78	165.50	0.890	Not Significant
	Higher	17	19.26			
Plantilla Position	Lower	21	18.81	164.00	0.901	Not Significant
	Higher	16	19.25			

As depicted in table 5, for variable age, the computed U is 159.5 with a p -value of 0.792 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of use of technology when they are grouped and compared according to age" is accepted.

For variable civil status, the computed U is 133.0 with a p -value of 0.945 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of use of technology when they are grouped and compared according to civil status" is accepted.

In the same manner, for variable average family monthly income, the computed U is 165.5 with a p -value of 0.890 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of use of technology when they are grouped and compared according to average family monthly income" is accepted.

Further for variable plantilla position, the computed U is 164.0 with a p -value of 0.901 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of use of technology when they are grouped and compared according to plantilla position" is accepted.

This implies that the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the area of the use of technology when they are grouped and compared according to age, civil status, average family monthly income, and plantilla position does not differ. This only shows that majority of the teachers are experiencing similar issues in the use of technology. Teachers' profile variables are not an influencing factor that differs their concerns in the use of technology.

The result is supported by the study conducted by Carreon et al (2021), wherein COVID-19 fear of teachers did not significantly differ across all sample characteristics age, monthly income, educational attainment, and teaching experience, except gender.

Table 6

Difference in the Degree of Difficulties Encountered by Teachers During COVID-19 Pandemic in the Area of Relationship With Learners, Peers, and Superiors When Grouped According to the Aforementioned Variables

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	16	23.88	90.00	0.015		Significant
	Older	21	15.29				
Civil Status	Single	10	20.65	118.50	0.567	0.05	Not Significant
	Married	27	18.39				
Average Family Monthly Income	Lower	20	21.30	124.00	0.155		Not Significant
	Higher	17	16.29				
Plantilla Position	Lower	21	19.33	161.00	0.827		Not Significant
	Higher	16	18.56				

As presented in table 6, for variable age, the computed U is 90.0 with a p -value of 0.015 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "significant." Therefore, the hypothesis states "there is no significant

difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of relationship with learners, peers, and superiors when they are grouped and compared according to age" is rejected.

With regards to the variable civil status, the computed U is 118.5 with a p -value of 0.567 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis that states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of relationship with learners, peers, and superiors when they are grouped and compared according to civil status" is accepted.

On variable average family monthly income, the computed U is 124.0 with a p -value of 0.155 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis states that "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of relationship with learners, peers, and superiors, when they are grouped and compared according to average family monthly income", is accepted.

Further for plantilla position, the computed U is 161.0 with a p -value of 0.827 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, thus, interpreted as "not significant." Therefore, the hypothesis states "there is no significant difference in the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during COVID-19 pandemic in the area of relationship with learners, peers, and superiors when they are grouped and compared according to plantilla position" is accepted.

This implies that the degree of difficulties encountered by teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in the area of relationships with learners, peers, and superiors when they are grouped and compared according to civil status, average family monthly income, and plantilla position does not vary, however, when grouped and compared according to age varies. Respondents' age is a contributing factor that triggers the variation of difficulties encountered by teachers during the pandemic regarding their relationship with learners, peers, and superiors.

The result is supported by the study conducted by Diana et al (2020), wherein there are significant difficulties faced in distance learning when compared according to age, while no significant difference in economic background and educational level.

Conclusions:

The study concluded that older, married, lower-income teachers in lower plantilla positions comprised most participants, with common struggles including lack of sleep, technological difficulties, and stakeholder engagement in school programs. Teachers faced similar challenges regardless of age, civil status, income, or position, although age influenced relationships with learners, peers, and superiors. To address these issues, the study recommended continuous teacher training on module preparation and remote teaching, psychosocial support programs for stress and time management, financial planning workshops, and wellness advocacy initiatives. Additionally, in-service ICT training, software utilization workshops, and expert-led seminars were advised to enhance teachers' digital proficiency. Team-building activities, focus group discussions, and stakeholder collaboration were also suggested to strengthen school relationships. Lastly, the study called for further research exploring additional variables affecting teachers' experiences.

Acknowledgment

The researcher humbly acknowledges the guidance and blessings that made this thesis possible, believing that perseverance and faith led the way despite challenges. Gratitude is extended for the wisdom and strength received, which ensured that everything fell into place. Deep appreciation goes to the adviser for unwavering support and patience, as well as to the expert panelists for their valuable insights in refining this study. Sincere thanks are also given to the respondents for their cooperation and honest responses. Above all, the researcher offers this work as a testament of gratitude and faith. To God be the glory.

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