



# Post-Pandemic Aspirations of Filipino Elementary School Teachers

Abegail Simbre<sup>1</sup>, Inero Ancho<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Elementary Education, College of Education, Central Luzon State University, Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Department of Human and Family Development Studies, College of Human Ecology, University of the Philippines Los Baños, Philippines

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## Abstract

The study aims to capture the post-pandemic aspirations of Filipino elementary school teachers. Since 2020 the participants have experienced handling modular, online, and blended distance teaching for two years. The participants responded to a validated set of open-ended questions to provide answers to established research questions. When asked to describe their pandemic teaching experiences, the participants generally described it to be challenging owing to various concerns such as modalities and strategies. With the continuous technological advancements and drastic changes brought about by COVID-19 pandemic, all teacher respondents expressed their desire to be at pace with the challenges and changes in the educational landscapes. For their aspirations, the following themes emerged: technological skills, professional growth and development, and maintaining a positive outlook.

**Keywords:** pandemic, teaching, aspirations, professional development

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## 1. Introduction

As Philippine schools gradually open doors to learners for the academic year, various modalities are being explored to address the problems of the learning set up. With teaching functions mostly emphasized face-to-face setting [1], it is undeniable that teachers face difficulties when it comes to strategies, assessment, and preparation. Filipino teachers have been at the frontline of the country's education system since the onset of the pandemic in early-2020, and even after two years of combatting numerous concerns, many issues and roadblocks are still faced by them. While personal and professional matters need to be attended, health and wellness are also pressing controversies that require attention and action.

Creating a post-pandemic scenario is anchored on previous and contemporary experiences. The success of past undertakings and current experience provide directions in identifying clear path for the future, especially in a post-pandemic setting. The environment also plays crucial role on education efficiency and outcomes [1].

As Filipino teachers pushed for uninterrupted learning, the decision to open the school year in 2020 was indeed a big leap among educators. Since face-to-face classes were not permitted due to restrictions, students learned via online or modular systems. Technology

was a great hurdle for students and teachers alike, especially in the Philippines where internet services are slow [2]. This breeds many other problems and challenges, thus the call for a more equitable approach. These experiences could probably summarize how Filipino teachers fared during the height of the pandemic. It is indeed interesting to note that despite the fact that teaching is being labelled as a career path that takes toll on well-being [3], individuals who are in the profession still continue to advance their own growth and development in any way possible.

What realizations have you had during your modular/online experience as a teacher? What would you like to achieve in the next 10 years? What support will you need to achieve these? What do you think will hinder/challenge you to achieve these? These inquiries provide directions to the present study. The proponents of the study argue that teachers' aspirations are linked to previous undertakings, and these create an impact as to how the future will be aspired, including soliciting possible support and potential challenges and barriers.

## 2. METHODS

The study used interpretative phenomenological research design for teachers to respond to a validated set of open-ended questions intending to investigate post pandemic aspirations amongst teachers. Researchers used the convenience sampling technique to select the

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\*Corresponding author; email: ivancho@up.edu.ph

27 participants who are teachers in the public elementary schools and had experienced handling modular, online, and blended distance learning for two years regardless of age and years in service. Their responses were arranged and analyzed according to emerging themes and overarching categories. According to Holstein et al. [4], qualitative research design centralizes the distinct human experiences and perceptions that describe social frames, recent situations, and participants can freely express and share their thoughts and pandemic experiences and future aspirations.

The participants of the study were 4 male and 23 female teachers, mostly aged 36 – 45 years old. There were 7 who have been teaching for at most 5 years, 9 teachers in service for 6 – 10 years, 8 for 11 - 15 years, while three have been serving for almost 16 - 30 years. All participants are elementary school teachers: 4 in the kindergarten, 5 in Grade 1, 3 in Grade 2, 5 in Grade 3, 3 in Grade 4, 1 in Grade 5, and 6 in Grade 6.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 TEACHERS' NARRATIVE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Generally, the teacher respondents unanimously described their current working experience during the pandemic as challenging. They claimed that the inevitable and abrupt transition from the traditional in-person teaching to the different distance learning modality offered by the Department of Education (DepEd) prescribed and stated in the Department Order No. 12 series of 2020 or the Adoption of The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan for School Year 2020-2021 In Light of The Covid-19 Public Health Emergency that the schools will adopt the printed or digitized modular, online learning, radio/tv-based instruction and / or a combination of these but in Quezon City, most students were under modular, online and or blended as they used TV as a supplementary learning resource. However, respondents complained that they were not trained to deliver their lessons in any of these distance learning modalities especially with teachers who are assigned to teach in kindergarten to the primary grades 1 to 3.

##### 3.1.1 TEACHERS' NARRATIVE DURING THE PANDEMIC

The teachers mostly complained about their students' attendance in their online classes and the responsiveness of the parents of students under the modular modality to their notices and messages in their chat group. According to the teacher respondents assigned in the primary grade levels, most of their students were under the printed modular delivery mode and they claimed that they do not know much about how their students are doing and learning from their parents and guardians at home since they could not properly monitor them especially when their parents

would not actively respond to their messages nor return the answered modules on time hence, they claim that their students did not learn much at home. Teacher 4 and Teacher 9 claimed that their students' parents do not reply nor even see their message in their group chats and so they had to wait until they get a response or action from the parents' ends which they said would usually be after a few days or sometimes, weeks. This, they said, frustrated them because they had to adjust the schedules stated in their Weekly Home Learning Plan.

As for the students under the online and blended modality, the teachers said that only a few attend their classes due to varied reasons like connectivity issues (available data allowances and internet network stability) and sharing of devices with their siblings from other grade levels (Simbre, 2021). The teacher respondents claimed that these are beyond their controls but need to be addressed promptly to bridge the learning gaps.

##### 3.1.2 Teachers' Workload and Well-being

Even during the pandemic, the teachers complained about their workload. Even with their work from home setup, they claimed that their administrative tasks are up high not to mention their usual preparation of their lessons for their online classes, printing of worksheets for their students under modular modality, attending webinars and meetings, communicating with their students and parents, and doing household chores. These, they said add up to their daily stress levels which could lead to their burnout as claimed by teachers 20, 21 and 25 who stated that their anxiety towards overcoming these challenges rose as the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns drags on.

A respondent mentioned that the coalescence of their work and household tasks and responsibilities make it stressful hence, Teacher 1 and 21 claimed that these affected their mental health as they live with these two and didn't have a time out for both. In addition, Teacher 24 emphasized that her workload before the pandemic is the same as her workload during pandemic but with more limitations of movement, barriers on communication, not only with students but with her fellow co-workers. These hindered their collaboration and decision-making on planning and implementation of their tasks and programs.

##### 3.1.3 Teaching Strategies

In addition to these, teachers mentioned about their desire to deliver lessons properly to students despite the challenges. However, the distance from their students made it hard to use different teaching strategies that require smart gadgets and good internet connectivity on their end and students'.

Teacher 24, a primary grade level teacher, worries about her students who still cannot or could hardly read. This is also a concern of the kindergarten teachers and as stated by Teacher 7, it is not easy to teach

her students online, because as beginners, her students need her constant monitoring and assessment to ensure that her students can independently read well. Teacher 11 added that monitoring her students' progress in both literacy and numeracy is hard as most of the time their parents respond late to her messages or would always say that their children can already read and count to which Teacher 17 said that she needs to personally assess them if they really can do as what their parents claim.

### 3.1.4 *Technological Issues*

Furthermore, some teacher respondents also mentioned about not having the gadgets that are more capable of handling different application for their online classes not to mention the slow and intermittent internet connect that consistently bothered them until now. Teacher 3 stated. "...I struggled so much because of the internet connection. This affected my teaching and students' engagement to my lessons."

Teacher 15 agreed to this and mentioned that these technological issues hindered her from delivering the lessons well and as planned. She said that with these and her limited time to conduct online classes per section (30 minutes per class), she could not elicit her desired responses from her students and could hardly assess them.

Although Teacher 23 said that she was able to manage these issues, she confessed that she knew that class participation and assessment were compromised. Teacher 25 also squealed that her teaching and learning transition from traditional classrooms to digital classrooms made her less confident because she is not well-versed in using them. "I am still learning it", she said. Despite these, Teacher 20 is confident that teachers can do it because they are usually flexible and that they can soon comfortably deliver their lessons through different digital platforms.

### 3.2 *GET REAL : TEACHERS' REALIZATION DURING THE PANDEMIC*

With the continuous technological advancements and drastic changes brought about by the COVID pandemic, all teacher respondents expressed their desire to be at pace with the challenges and changes in the educational landscapes. Technological advancements were sped up too as everything shifted to online learning modality. Aside from upskilling and reskilling their technological knowledge, they confessed that upgrading their computer hardware, smart devices, and internet connection are a prime necessity during these two years of using distance learning modality.

Teachers 1 and 3, however, complained that upgrading both their technological skills and gadgets would require much effort, time, and money. Teacher 9 agreed that coping and thriving amid pandemic required her to consider financial, mental, and emotional capacities to be able to do both. They claimed that

these entail additional financial burden as they needed to take out some loan in order to join their virtual meetings, webinars and online classes and not be left behind. The Department of Education (DepEd) and the local government unit (LGU) though they provide some laptops, do not provide the necessary devices to all teachers.

In addition, they aspire to be able to innovate their ways of teaching to be on par with the interests of their students and the demands of the times and urgency. Hence, Teacher 10 mentioned about being able to learn how to use new technologies in education as she continues to upskill her technological know-how. This way, she said, she can better utilize the different programs as well as innovate her teaching strategies for her students to improve learning. Teacher 12 and Teacher 15 agreed that they had to make huge adjustments in their teaching strategies and approach to better cater to their learners. In addition, Teacher 22 admitted that new normal teaching requires the proper use of technology so teachers should continuously upgrade their computer skills to which Teacher 26 added that she needs to be more creative and adept with learning apps and programs for her to better deliver her lessons online. Most of them agreed that computer literacy is a must in the new normal.

#### 3.2.1 *Importance of Technology and Parental Involvement*

Furthermore, they have proven the importance of active parental involvement as there should be a strong partnership between teachers and parents to care for students. Teacher 4 complained that she had to extend her module retrieval because parents are usually passive with her deadlines. Teacher 5 claimed that distance learning can only be effective if the learners have a responsible guardian to facilitate learner participation in online classes and asynchronous learning and a dependable internet connection and appropriate devices. Parents and/or guardians have a great role in developing the minds of their children especially during the pandemic times when teachers cannot have a direct contact with their learners. This was also stated in Simbre's (2021) study that parents' economic and household activities greatly affect their time and effort in guiding and monitoring their children's lessons.

#### 3.2.2 *Open and Consistent Communication Line*

Moreover, Teacher 9 mentioned that she had to stretch her patience and understanding with some parents' difficult attitudes as there are times when it is hard to communicate with unwilling parents. Teacher 13 strengthened this claim that students succeed more with parents willing to teach and guide their children in asynchronous activities. She emphasized that parents, students, and teacher must adjust and move towards the same direction, and these can be done through open and consistent communication. All of

them must be welcoming of the idea to voice out their concerns to attain favorable results. Social media have also been used to foster relay of messages, along with observation of ethics and reliance. [7]

In addition, the lack of gadgets and poor or no internet access, meant students could hardly participate in online classes or watch recorded classes and other related and supplementary videos to their lessons. Teacher 25 stated that her responsible learners with internet access can independently access their lessons, work on and submit their assignments correctly on time.

### 3.2.3 *Face-to-face and Traditional Classes VS. Distance Learning*

In their responses, most realized that it is much easier to teach in face-to-face classes than conduct online, modular, or even blended learning due to differences in students' family structures and economic status. They claimed that reaching their students from low-income family is hard especially when the parents are busy in their jobs. Teacher 21 stated that she is aware of the importance of learning continuity, but still prefers the physical setting of a classroom than the virtual. Teacher 22 agreed that assessment of learners is very challenging because she is unsure whether the modules were answered by her learners or by their parents/guardians.

### 3.2.4 *Teachers' Positive Attitude*

Teacher 24 commended teachers' resilience in facing the different challenges brought by the pandemic. She admires teachers' flexibility and emotional strength to handle hurdles during the pandemic and found ways to attain teaching objectives. Teacher 17 emphasized that knowing their students' conditions can help them to better decide. However, Teachers 9 and 21 said that it is hard to maintain positive outlook towards their job and life as they, too, had to face their personal challenges at home which usually includes financial concerns but had to triumph over these as they constantly face their students' parents who also need their assistance. A study revealed that teachers' anxiety has actually surpassed their ability to manage, all because of the pandemic. [8]

## 3.3 *TEACHERS' ASPIRATIONS IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS*

When teachers were asked about the things that they would want to achieve in the next ten years the following themes emerged.

### 3.3.1 *Technological Skills*

For two years of implementing blending distance learning modality, the teacher respondents acknowledged the importance of continued improvement in their technological skills as traditional teaching will no longer be used in the future. They foresee that it

will be inevitable to not use technology in their teaching just like what teacher 23 mentioned that teachers should continuously upskill and upgrade their ICT skills. Hence, the government should help teachers with the acquisition of proper gadgets. Rapanta et al. [9] have concluded the need to recognized technologies being significant part of teaching and learning breakthroughs. Proper use of educational technology could help teachers cope with the many changes that are posed in the future.

### 3.3.2 *Professional Growth and Development*

Moreover, they consistently mentioned about getting their current ranks promoted for better financial situations. All of them are eyeing for the completion of their master's degrees for them to qualify for promotion in the department. On the other hand, they also look at improving their teaching practice by attending to in-service courses provided by their department and its linkages. A study by Al Jarf [10] recognized how social media serves as a platform to advance professional development of teachers. Other respondents mentioned about conducting research and innovations so they can use these as a credential for promotion while others want to get additional skills certifications from recognized and credible institutions. They mentioned about continuing professional development to help them go through the challenges that lie ahead. They are aware that the use of technology will bring more convenience and comfort after the pandemic.

### 3.3.3 *Maintaining a Positive Outlook*

With all the challenges they have gone through, they emphasized that teachers must maintain dedication and sincerity to teaching and work towards students' interests. Most mentioned about their students' academic achievement, maintaining a strong community partnership, mentor other teachers to help them get through the same challenges easier, engage with professional organizations to broaden their professional networks and be able to help their learning communities by sharing expertise and knowledge. Also, they brace themselves of the possible changes in the education system after the pandemic.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 *Conclusions*

In the attempt to capture the narratives of Filipino teachers during the pandemic up to the present scenario with the hope of providing research-based analysis, the study was able to identify (a) teachers' realizations on modular and online learning, (b) their aspirations for achievements in the next ten years, (c) their identified needs to achieve those, and (d) foreseen obstacles blocking achievements. The emerging themes provide insights in 'developing a relevant program' or

even re-designing the existing program to address the highlighted concerns, leading to appropriate decision making, planning and better allocation of resources for equitable education.

Moreover, proponents of the study hope to highlight teachers' role towards the success of the teaching-learning process by providing avenues for discourse, particularly in terms of school leadership and management. As most identified aspirations are linked to presently experienced challenges, it is high time to revisit teacher professional development efforts and provide clear-cut programs that directly impact teacher welfare and well-being. Assigning competent and satisfied teachers to lead our classrooms breed learners who positively take academic challenges and ready to embark on acquiring skills that correspond to their own aspirations, the way teachers create their own.

Furthermore, the results share episodes of pandemic-driven education experiences similar with that of other countries confirming the universality of the pandemic's effects on the international educational landscape, especially on developing countries. Nonetheless, the investigation highlights the universality of the Filipino teacher participants' personal experiences. They along with their pupils have faced the lack of resources, information and information technology skills, poor communication and constraints on parental involvement.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

The analysis in this study is limited within the participants' aspirations on technological growth, professional growth and development, and maintaining positive outlook. The future researches may also explore teachers' aspirations on their own health and well-being, and stakeholders' preparation for a probable pandemic permeation to proactively uphold quality education even in the existence of a fatal disease.

Since the research design is qualitative in nature relying on the unique experiences of teacher participants, and no generalization is claimed. Nevertheless, the universality and diversity of the qualitative data - the teacher participants' experiences, can be confirmed through further empirical exploration on another group of respondents with higher number, and the same inclusive criteria with respect to their age, gender, and grade level in which they teach.

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