

CHALLENGES OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN THE NEW NORMAL: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT :

The world has been turned upside down due to the pandemic but one aspect which was really affected was the education system therefore, the researchers believe that because of the sudden change in the education system, there is a must to discover the challenges experienced by the kindergarten teachers which focused on how they have handled such challenges and the effects it has brought upon them due to the pandemic and the shift in the conduct of classes. The study was qualitative in nature and has employed a descriptive-phenomenological design. There were 10 kindergarten teachers who participated in this study which came from 4 different schools located in Digos City. The interview guide questions were utilized to identify the challenges, coping mechanisms, and effects of new normal to the kindergarten teachers. The participants underwent an in-depth interview face-to-face while observing the proper safety protocols. The data gathered were analyzed which resulted in six themes for the challenges, seven themes for the coping mechanisms and three themes for the effects of new normal. The data gathered resulted in determining the main challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers such as lack of resources or support from the school administration. Subsequently, another challenge for the teachers is how they can deliver the lessons to their young students. The main coping mechanism for the kindergarten teachers was acceptance and being positive whilst the main theme for the effects of the new normal was mindset changes and the importance of technological skills. In conclusion, the data implicates that the kindergarten teachers did undergo a lot of challenges due to the pandemic and to the shift of the conduct of classes. It is discussed that there were a lot of lapses especially in the support they have received from the school administration and on their coping mechanisms. Therefore, the researchers inferred that kindergarten teachers must be supported in all aspects during this new normal and that training and other support should be offered to them.

Keywords: Challenges of Kindergarten Teachers, Covid-19 Pandemic, New Normal

1. INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had huge disruptive effects on normal life, difficult as it already was in many countries. For schools, students and parents, the impact of closed schools and children stuck at home with little or no access to learning, the effect has been devastating. The recession and its impact have highlighted vulnerabilities in educational structures. Kindergarten years are one of the most crucial part in a

child's learning as it encompasses all of their foundations in learning. This pandemic has brought not just challenges for the students but also for the kindergarten teachers to adjust, to develop new and unique strategies and to learn new way to deliver the lessons with little to no support or training. Experts estimate that a whole year of learning could be lost; meaning a whole cohort of students could be permanently lagging behind in their learning. With environmental issues, technological disruptions and globalized communications, certain disasters are now becoming progressively probable (Panth & Geronimo, 2019).

Across America, the Coronavirus pandemic has rewritten the syllabus for the school year 2020 – 2021. Kindergarten teachers are facing formidable challenges, whether educating students in masked-up, socially distant classrooms or virtually from computer screens. Virtual Learning is one of the adequate problems faced by kindergarten teachers (Farkas, 2003). In a typical year, a child's first day of kindergarten is a significant event for pupils and their families. Trepidation, anticipation, enthusiasm, and uncertainty might accompany the change. Some children arrive with greater support and exposure to formal educational settings than others. These issues are magnified this year, as the world is in the midst of a pandemic, not only for students and parents, but also for teachers and school officials. Moreover, Tate (2021) states that many children have missed out on learning opportunities or have not been learning in optimal conditions which makes it one of the problems of educators have to confront in establishing realistic expectations for where students are developmentally, cognitively, and socially when they attend kindergarten.

In the Philippines, studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were undertaken. As a result of the crisis, teachers were forced to shift their classes from physical classrooms to distance learning platforms. Despite psychological tension or fear, Filipino instructors maintained a cheerful attitude. (Collie & Martin, 2016). The Philippines is one of just five countries in the world that has not started in-person lessons since the outbreak, denying more than 27 million Filipino students their right to education. Because they live in areas where schools have been closed during the pandemic, an estimated eight million pupils around the world—who should have been in first grade—have been waiting for their first day of in-person instruction for over a year and counting. Despite the fact that countries around the world are taking steps to enable remote learning, at least 29% of primary pupils are not being reached. Aside from a lack of resources for remote learning, the youngest children may be unable to participate owing to a lack of technological assistance, a poor learning environment, pressure to do family duties, or being compelled to labor (UNICEF, 2021).

In Region XI (Davao Region), the COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the near-total closures of schools, universities, and colleges. During the pandemic situation, teachers indeed had to face work and life changes. In addition, with the online-blended learning approach, teachers face challenges as they embrace the new teaching norm. Schools are still challenged to fill the gaps in providing both teachers and students with resources and capabilities in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as they embrace the paradigm shift in pedagogical delivery (Department of Education, 2020). The work commitment of teachers during the COVID-19 crisis is important in the school context. In response to this crisis, teachers had to abruptly transition their lessons from physical classrooms to distance learning platforms. While they face many challenges in their efforts to meet their students' development needs, they remain committed to the education and emotional, social, cognitive, physical and spiritual well-being of their learners (Baloran & Hernan, 2020).

The researchers believe that since this topic is new due to the occurrence of the Covid 19 pandemic, there is little study about it most especially concerning the kindergarten teachers. The researchers would specifically want to tackle the concerns and challenges of the kindergarten teachers because the voices of these kindergarten teachers are not really that much heard rather than those of elementary teachers. In conducting this study, the researcher's purpose was to know the different challenges on which kindergarten teachers have to face in today's new normal set-up. Hence, the researchers sought to know more about how the kindergarten teachers maintain the quality of teaching and learning of the students even with the absence of face-to-face interactions. Additionally, it aimed to help the kindergarten teachers lessen their challenges in today's new normal set-up and to examine the effect of these challenges towards their teaching performance, well-being and professional growth.

This research was made in order to describe the challenges encountered by the kindergarten teachers in Digos City. It is undeniable that educators, in this time of pandemic, are very challenged to deliver and

conduct classes despite the distance brought by the pandemic. The researchers want to showcase the coping mechanisms or strategies used by these kindergarten teachers in order to cope with the struggles they have faced. Lastly, the effects brought by these challenges upon the teachers are also determined by this study.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper aimed to determine the challenges of the Kindergarten Teachers in a New Normal Set-Up. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges of the Kindergarten teachers in a new normal set-up?
2. What are the strategies applied by the kindergarten teachers to cope up with these challenges?
3. What are the effects of today's new normal setup as a kindergarten teacher?

3. METHODS

3.1. Respondents

The study focused on ten (10) Kindergarten teachers who are working in Digos City. The researchers used a purposive sampling in which it determines the preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. The inclusion criteria are as follow: (1) The respondent must be a resident of Digos City and is teaching in Digos City; (2) The respondent must be in legal age; (3) The respondent must be a teacher of a kindergarten section in any recognized school in Digos City; and lastly (4) The respondent must have 2 years or more teaching experience in Kindergarten.

These ten (10) teachers were briefed and interviewed one-on-one by researchers about their struggles in a new normal set-up, the briefing and asking for permission were relayed from the school principal to which they belong since the respondents of this research study do not belong in one school only, to ensure variety of experiences, teacher interviewed were coming from different public schools. There are 3 teachers from Aplaya Elementary School, 2 from Ruparan Elementary School, 2 teachers from Dawis Elementary School and 3 teachers from Pedro V. Basalan Elementary School. All in all, the researchers conducted interviews with 10 kindergarten teachers within 4 schools.

The respondents were interviewed face-to-face. The researchers ensured all the necessary documents and safety precautions in the safety protocols before the face-to-face interview was conducted. The researchers conducted the interview in a classroom, securing a six-foot distance from the respondents but still having the right amount of details be heard even in the recordings. However, out of ten (10) participants, only six (6) were interviewed face-to-face while the remaining four (4) participants were asked through an interview questionnaire, as advised by their school principal due to heavy schedules. The researchers still made sure of the quality of responses collected through the participants despite the difficulty and change of interview method.

3.2 Instruments

The main data sources were from the answers from the Primary Informant Interviews (KII). KII is typically selected, according to Kumar (2000), because there are limited numbers of participants who are required to provide information about the phenomenon. As this is very appropriate in the research sample, researchers agreed to use this technique. The addresses of who agreed to be interviewed were also scattered enormously. With the use of interview guide questions, the interview was semi-structured. The researchers requested the informants' permission to record the interview using an audio recorder. To make the respondents comfortable, the researchers tried to make the interview conversational in nature.

In this particular study, the researchers opted to use a thematic analysis in order to fully describe the responses from the kindergarten teachers. In qualitative research, thematic analysis has been poorly branded, yet commonly used (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and has rarely been valued in the same way as grounded theory,

ethnography, or phenomenology. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that, since it offers key skills for many other types of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis should be a foundational tool for qualitative analysis. Since thematic analysis is a tool used by many qualitative approaches, many scholars have maintained that it is not a separate method, but rather something to be used to assist researchers in analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Colaizzi's (1978) approach was used to analyze the data by the researchers. Colaizzi's approach has seven phases (as quoted by Shosha, 2012, p. 33)



Fig 1 : Study design

3.3 Design & Procedure

This qualitative research employed a descriptive - phenomenological research design. Qualitative is research concerned with inquiring about certain phenomena or events (Amorado, 2017). Qualitative research is particularly useful for gathering culturally contextual knowledge about a population's beliefs, attitudes, habits, and social contexts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017).

Phenomenology, on the other hand, is a research understanding the lived experiences of a people (Creswell, 2007; Amorado, 2017). Following a concise phenomenological approach explains "the interactions being lived through very carefully and a detailed phenomenological psychological examination of the data takes place in the context of phenomenological psychological reduction once the raw data has been collected" (Gibbs, 2018).

The use of a descriptive phenomenological technique is more suited to examine the experiences of kindergarten teachers during the new normal set up, given the goals underpinning each of the primary phenomenological approaches. When nothing is known about an issue and the goal of the study is to make obvious and explain the most essential meaning of a phenomenon of interest from the perspective of individuals directly involved in it, a descriptive phenomenological technique is adopted (Nowell & Albrecht, 2019). Descriptive phenomenology aspires to "reduce" the world from its natural state, i.e., where knowledge is held in judgment, to a world of pure phenomena (Sundler, Lindberg, Nilsson, & Palmér, 2019).

In the conduct of the study, the following steps were undertaken:

Permission to Conduct the Study. In the gathering of data, the researchers sent a letter duly signed by the research adviser, favorably endorsing to the office of the Principal of UM Digos College Department of Education (BEED), to the Research Publication Office and to the Research Coordinator, to allow the researchers to conduct the study through an interview involving the Kindergarten Teachers. The letter states the researchers' intention of assessing the challenges faced by the Kindergarten Teachers in a new normal set-up in Digos City.

Administration and Retrieval of the Instruments. The researcher then on did a school-to-school visitation to ask for the school principal's approval in conducting the interview to their kindergarten teachers. After asking for permission, the researchers then interviewed the Kindergarten Teachers who did give their consent to participate in the interview.

Collecting and Processing of the Data. After the retrieval of the data collected from the interview conducted, data was transcribed and processed into a transcription of relevant answers. The researcher's passed the overall transcript to the research analyst to analyze the data gathered.

Interpretation and Analysis of Data. When the data is obtained and tabulated, the said data is analyzed and interpreted based on the study's purpose. The researchers then formulate the themes of the study and how relevant it is to the study.

In gathering the respondents, the researchers asked the help of the head of each institution and other staff. The researcher asked if they can interview the kindergarten teachers who face challenges in a new normal set-up. The researchers wrote a letter to them requesting their involvement by school visitation after collecting the names of the Kindergarten educators. Phone calls were also made by researchers and asked if they were willing to participate. The researchers then identified the date of the interview for who gave their positive answers.

As the researchers identified the participants of the study, the schedule for the face-to-face interview was made. The schedule was made in accordance with their free time. The researchers managed to make sure to submit specific documents to the university's administration allowing them to conduct a face-to-face interview with the participants. The conduct of the interview was made with adherence to the strict rules of safety protocols of social distancing and protective gears. The researchers made sure that they are 6 feet away from the participants and are wearing a face shield and a face mask; it goes also to the participants.

Although the researchers manage to conduct face-to-face interviews with some of the participants, six (6) of the participants suggests that they would just answer a questionnaire containing all the questions which is ought to be ask in an interview as they are too busy requiring all the necessary paperworks assigned to them by the school administration they are in. This was also requested by their principal as the researchers also asked for permission from the principal. With the retrieval of questionnaires wherein they have answered, researchers still followed a strict protocol to social distancing.

3.4 Ethical Consideration

The ethical protocols and guidelines established by the University of Mindanao Ethics Committee are strictly followed throughout this research. The researchers diligently sought and received the necessary permission from relevant teachers and administrators to complete this study. The researchers verifies the acceptability of selected schools and kindergarten teachers in Digos City and examines the amount of threat and mitigation methods (including physical, psychological and social economic). The study participants are also given adequate authorization and consent, in which they are assured that all of their rights will be adequately protected, particularly in the management of data such as:

Voluntary Participation. The involvement of the study participants has always been totally and utterly voluntary and anonymous to safeguard their anonymity and relevant data was being provided just when the respondents can't comprehend, prior to actually making a decision to either partake and not in the research. Respondents' name did not show up anywhere else and no one other than the researchers know regarding the respondents' direct information. Whereas if data is to be kept private, the researchers assigns each interviewee a number and a pseudonym, and then only the researchers has the knowledge to determine which number originally belonged to which interviewee.

Privacy and Confidentiality. In order to ensure the privacy and anonymity of each respondent, the data collected from them was safeguarded by the researchers and kept private and confidential.

Informed Consent Process. The researchers ensured an informed consent given and forwarded to the respondents indicating their rights and what they would expect in the conduct of the study. The informed consent contains all the necessary precautions and benefits they would gain in participating in the study. Furthermore, the interview was conducted through the approval of the school authorities in which the respondents are affiliated with and as well as the approval of the respondents themselves.

Risks. The researchers take note of the risks especially that the virus is still present, not just for themselves but also for the respondents. The researchers ensured that safety protocols were observed and there were no high risks entertained which would put the researchers and the interviewee in danger.

Benefits. The main beneficiary for this study are kindergarten teachers who were the main focus of this study, as they were given a platform to convey their challenges and the struggles they are facing during the new normal. Next was the students and their parents in a way that the quality of education they will be experiencing despite the distance will be improved as the status of their kindergarten teachers will improve. Lastly, the school administrators, they would benefit in this study as they will know the struggles experienced by their employees and they can do specific measures and improvements in order to make their employees happy and their quality of education during the new normal be improved.

Plagiarism. The researchers ensure that the comprehensive and complete citation of concepts from other authors and experts was done in accordance with the school requirements. This paper was verified for grammatical errors and infringement using Grammarly and Turnitin tools in order to accomplish this.

Fabrication. Even though this analysis is based on multiple previous investigations, the researchers made sure that at least there is no invention any stories to go along with the research. As a result, everything of the information supplied was meticulously recorded and referenced. This study depended on credible journal articles as well as other academic works with all of its references.

Falsification. This study follows the APA 6th edition citation format's citation guidelines, thus there is no distortion of research or change of any data acquired in the study. The data and statistics gathered are written in some of the most precise manner possible.

Conflict of Interest. There has been no evidence of potential conflicts of interest (COI), and there were no circumstances under which an opinion about a main interest, including the well being of respondents or the reliability of this research, is directly impacted by a secondary interest, such as financial or academic gains or acknowledgements.

Permission from Organization/Location. Before the conduct of the study, the researchers ensured all approval from the school authorities to which the participants are affiliated with. The researchers made sure to follow and to honor the decisions and approval of the school administrators.

Authorship. In conducting the research, the researchers considers the authorship qualifications. The researchers, with the advice and encouragement of the research adviser, made significant contributions towards the idea and concept, data gathering, data analysis, and interpretation of results. The paper was written collectively by the researchers and adviser, and it is rigorously revised for essential academic substance. Each contributed to the investigation that resulted in the research being published.

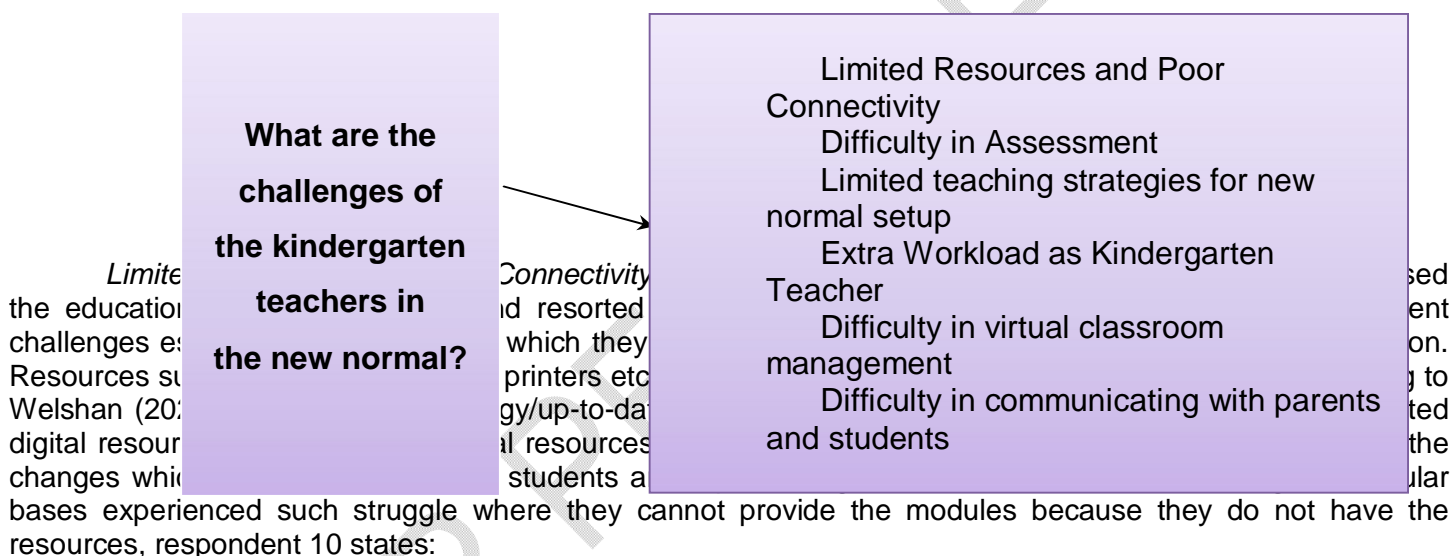
4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the result of the study and the discussion of the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers during the New Normal.

4.1. Experiences of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Normal

This area of the paper examines the qualitative findings of the challenges experienced by Kindergarten Teachers. Table 1 shows the six themes derived from interviews with the kindergarten teachers showing their struggles with the change in the conduct of classes namely: Limited Resources and Poor Connectivity, Difficulty in Assessment, Limited teaching strategies for new normal setup, Extra Workload as Kindergarten Teacher, Difficulty in virtual classroom management and Difficulty in communicating with parents and students.

Table 1. Data Analysis of Challenges Experienced by Kindergarten Teachers in the New Normal



Kining supplies sa bond paper man gud sa amoa dapat per month then nakulang man maong kaming mga teachers kami ang mag provide, makagasto jud mi ug kaning sa printer sad kay usahay mag trouble kay daghan mang mga estudyante ba naa juy time madaot (The supplies of bond paper are not enough for each teacher so we have to provide from our own pockets. Also, we do experience having troubles with the printer).

In this context, it only shows how it is challenging not just for the students but also for the teachers to provide quality education through modules and online platforms when in fact resources and internet connection is not reliable. According to the study made by Baticulun et. al (2020), 32% of students struggled to adjust to the new learning style and 22% struggled with unstable internet connection out of 3, 670 students surveyed. Kindergarten teachers who are teaching using blended learning where they are having online classes and modular instruction states that:

According to Respondent 8, issues such as technical Issues where there is unfamiliarity to the use of technology, time-consuming resources and sitting skills, attention span and preparedness of the kids during online classes.

According to Respondent 6, the challenge of a teacher in the new normal includes internet issues, managing virtual classroom behavior, poor communication with parents and preparations.

It is such a hindrance to these kindergarten teachers where they have to use their own money just to provide materials to use in producing modules where in fact it should have been provided. Issues with regards to the internet connection are not just a teacher problem but a country's problem as it affects not only the teachers and students but also normal citizens. In times right now where distance is prevalent in the education system, there must be means to provide both enough resources and stable connection.

Difficulty in Assessment. Assessing students is one of the many jobs a kindergarten teacher must do. In the new normal, teachers are not allowed to conduct face to face classes and home visitation making it hard for them to assess the capability of their students. Assessment requires teachers to see the student and evaluate their performance which is easy to do before there is a face to face class. Kindergarten teachers doubt if the children are really the one answering the modules or if it is their parents who do the job.

According to Respondent 5, in implementing modular modality, one challenge would be the authenticity of the learners, second would be the level of learning that the students acquire.

Teachers are concerned with how knowledge is passed to the students when they do not see them face to face in order to evaluate if they are really learning. This strengthens the statement of Blessing (2020) where he states that teachers have no way of knowing if their students are learning anything. Student's assessment will show the effectiveness of the instruction and the quality of education provided and if it is not done by the teachers, they do not have the evidence of how the student performed.

Respondent 9 testifies that, ang akong problema is mag hatag gud mi ug checklist kay naa man gud didto sa checklist nga icheck namo didto kung kabalo naba mupperform ang bata. Ang pag grado baya sa bata kay ingon ana baya. Sa performance. (We do have a checklist in which it serves as a grading sheet for our students to see if they improve or not. My problem is I cannot do the checklist because I can't see my student personally).

As Faramarzi et. al. (2020) mentioned that although online learning can develop a lot of advantages, it can be difficult for Kindergarten teachers to monitor students' conduct and contributions, as well as to determine whether or not the students are paying attention in class and progressing, and whether or not the students are the ones who answered the modules. This has escalated the challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers aside from all the challenges they are facing because of the pandemic.

Limited teaching strategies for new normal setup. Before the Covid 19 virus struck the world, kindergarten teachers used every tool and technique they could use in order to convey knowledge to their students. It is to be taken in consideration that every student is different and has different learning capabilities which is why it is much harder for teachers to conduct their classes in the new normal setup because there are only limited ways to provide quality education to kindergarten students. Respondent 4 mentioned the importance of kindergarten education as it is the foundation of knowledge of students. She states in her statement that –

It's really difficult because kindergarten is the foundation and dapat unta ni siya I one on one jud dapat sa teacher ang bata. Especially sa kinder kay lahi rajud ang parents sa teacher nga mag introduce. (It's really difficult because kindergarten years are the foundation of a child's knowledge and a teacher must have a face to face interaction with the children to help them build up this foundation. Parents and teachers have different ways of teaching.)

In regards to this context, Holdheide (2020) explains that due to the abrupt explosion of COVID-19, where face-to-face communication is restricted; teachers prefer to limit their teaching technique. There is now a barrier between teacher and students because of the distance. The teachers cannot do what they are trained to do because of the adjustments they have to make.

According to Respondent 4, the challenges na niface namo is we had no face to face, we cannot apply our strategies during our lesson. Then if our children know about or gain knowledge, Makakat-on ba jud

silas through to our modular. (The challenges we had encountered is that we cannot apply our strategies in doing lessons because there is no face to face contact. Additionally, I am not so sure if my students can gain knowledge or understand the lessons in the module because I am not the one delivering the lessons personally).

It is very difficult for the teachers to adjust their teaching styles to what the new normal demands for because it is what they are used to doing and they know that their past teaching technique really do benefit the students but now that there is only modular learning where they cannot see their students and blended learning where the use of radio and online platform are used and not all students have the privilege of having such resources resulting to adjustments on the teacher's side. All in all, having the change in teaching strategies with problems such as lack of resources, gadgets and stable connection, adds up to more challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers.

Extra Workload as Kindergarten Teacher. Kindergarten teachers have more workload than what they have before when there is a face to face class. In the new normal, kindergarten teachers need to prepare modules which will be used in order to educate their students in their own way at home. Unfortunately, kindergarten students are not like elementary students where they can engage themselves in working on their modules which is another task for teachers to ensure that the modules they provide should be engaging to the eyes of the students to encourage them in answering the modules.

Respondent 6 mentioned that modules should be properly organized and should be made meaningful, motivational and memorable. I have to make sure that it is well organized and students will learn while being entertained.

According to Respondent 7, it is very challenging on my part when I have to prepare and finish all modules and worksheets for the entire week, distribute them and make sure that all parents can receive a complete set of modules as well as to make sure that learning will be transferred to students.

With this statement being said, it goes along with what Mayol (2020) stated as teachers must guarantee that the quality of learning is maintained, even in the absence of face-to-face interactions, from lesson planning through class conduct and assignment distribution. Kindergarten teachers must ensure to their students that the modules they are distributing can be used by parents and students to learn by them and not just for display. Additionally Barron et al. (2021) justifies that preparing lessons during this pandemic is far more difficult than before, because the focus isn't just on ensuring that the learning is transferred to the students, but also on ensuring that it is delivered to them. It is the job of kindergarten teachers to deliver knowledge through the modules to the students at their own home without compromising the quality and credibility of lessons given to them.

Difficulty in virtual classroom management. There is a huge difference in how teachers conduct classes in a classroom and in an online platform. In a classroom, there is a face to face interaction happening between the teacher and the students and the teacher has the sole authority inside the classroom which he/she can use to catch everyone's attention. On the other hand, in an online class where there are a lot of things which can take away a student's attention from his/her teacher, it can be quite challenging for the kindergarten teachers to engage and manage his/her own class.

As per mentioned by Respondent 8, students can engage through real-time learning and discussion using online platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. Students can also learn and do activities at their own pace using the instructions given by the teachers online such as Google Classroom, ClassFlow and Facebook Messenger.

Online classes are very much dependent on the internet connection. Poor internet connection means poor class or no class at all. According to Welshan (2020), the lack of technology/up-to-date technology, lack of technology teacher experience, limited digital resources, and lack of financial resources have impeded many schools' ability to engage in online classes. Underfunded cities and children are suffering during this pandemic that teachers need to deal with. It is the very duty of a teacher to convey and deliver lessons in any means possible, in this case, through online class.

Respondent 6 conveys that it is difficult to reach out to all the learners at home, especially this time that we're not allowed to conduct face-to-face visitation. Kids get easily distracted and have trouble maintaining focus. I have to engage the learners.

Although both the teacher and the student wanted to make work the new normal setup, challenges really went in their way such as internet connection and disturbances. It is very stressful for these kindergarten teachers to engage their children in online classes because these children have short attention spans and cannot stay too long sitting in a chair in front of a camera. Teachers have a double workload where they have to deliver the lesson through online class, which is already difficult, and thinking of ways in order to engage their students in listening to them.

Difficulty in communicating with parents and students. It is undeniable that while teachers deal with children, they also have to deal with their parents, especially now that they are the one who collects the modules in the school and they are the one assisting their children. Having a great relationship with the parents can lessen the burden of a teacher but it can also double up their challenges because they have to deal with both an adult and a child. According to Morin (2020), in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, efficient containment strategies require improved communication, transparency, and trust.

A testimony from Respondent 2 shows the differences with the way parents handle their children with how teachers should handle children –

Ang nahitabo kay ang mga mag answer sa module kay ang mga parents na. Naa puy usahay nitudlo, mutumbling ang bata mabunalan na nila. Bawal baya ta manapat no kay naa baya tay Child Protection Act. Naa tay policy so lisod kaayo nga dili makita. Challenge kaayo siya. (Instead of students, parents are the one answering the modules. In an instance, a child was spanked by a parent because of not listening. We do have our laws and it is not right to beat the child because of not listening. It is very challenging).

Teachers are very much concerned about how parents deliver and help their children in answering and acquiring knowledge from the module. In this new normal, parents are expected to be the one to assist their children at home in their learning journey because teachers cannot meet them face to face. Respondents 5 and 3 are alarmed with the authenticity of the answers whether or not it is the sole work of the student or it is just their parents answering the modules.

One challenge would be the assurance that the learning competencies would be clear in the given modules and be taken positively by both parents and students.

Dili ko sure if akoang students ba jud naga-answer sa module and if naa ba jud kaya silay natun-an or ilang parents ra bay nagbuot-buot ug answer. (I am not sure if my students are the ones who answered the module and if they learned something or if their parents are just the one answering it).

Another challenge for the teachers are parents who don't usually pick up the modules in time. Most of the parents are busy and cannot go to school and take a new set of modules for their children. In this instance, the children are left behind. It is the struggle for the teachers to continuously approach and remind the parents to get the modules at school and sometimes they even tend to use black mails so that they will get the modules.

So seldom lang, sa nagkadugay sa among mga modules gamay nalang sa mga parents ang naga ari, naga kuha. Gina usa nalang niya, mao na ang disadvantage sa module kay anytime they want, ang parents kay ginahuraw namo sila through chats na kung dili nainyo ni makuha kay amo silang I drop. Amoa na sila ginaharuan ug strategy ba. (The disadvantage of the modular instruction is that some of the parents no longer take the modules of their child on the scheduled time. They take it one at a time. So for us teachers, we made a strategy where we tend to threaten them in order for them to go pick up the modules).

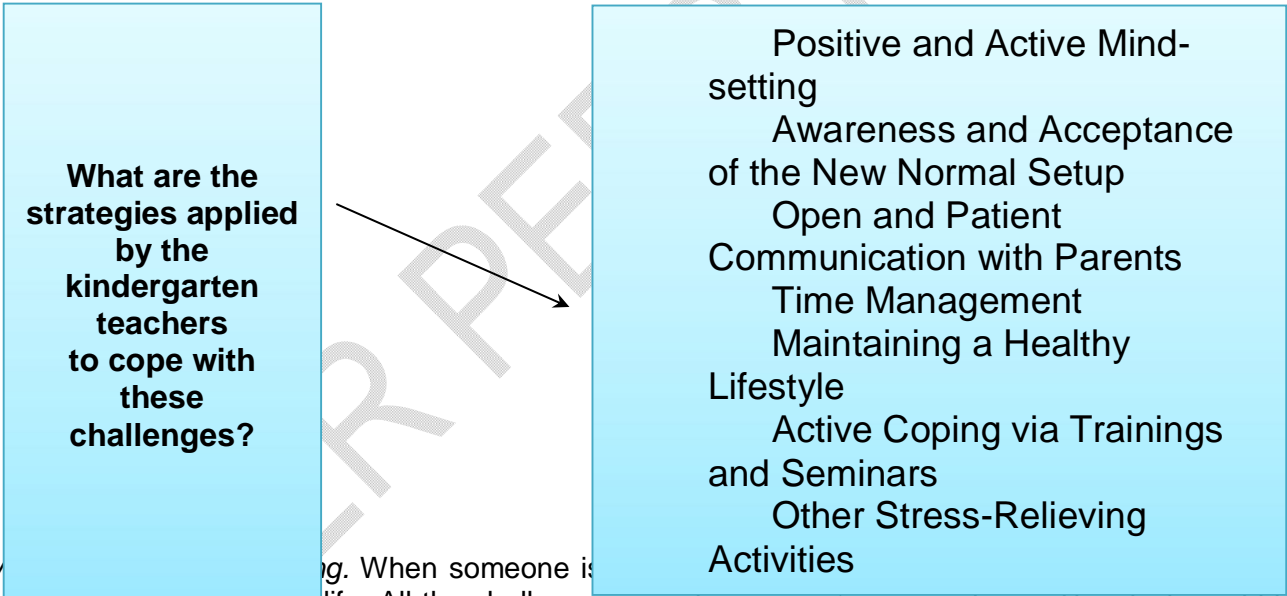
Having to build rapport with your students' parents while experiencing a lot more challenges brought by the new normal can be distressful to these kindergarten teachers. Additionally, there are parents who are very

hard to get in touch with because not all of them have smart phones that they can use to interact in chats. One of the difficulties in interacting with parents and children is that not every family can afford a smartphone and the associated costs of maintaining a stable internet connection. Apart from the fact that the teacher's presence in the learning process is truly jeopardized, internet stability in our country is also a major issue. Students' learning is harmed by a lack of teacher presence (Mayol, 2020). It should have been a two-way process in which parents should work with the teachers in order to help their children learn and teachers should assist parents in how they can teach and assist children at home.

4.2. Strategies of Kindergarten Teachers in Coping with New Normal Challenges

This part of the research paper focuses on the coping mechanisms used by kindergarten teachers in order to handle the challenges they have faced in the new normal. The analysis resulted to seven themes namely: Positive and Active Mind-setting , Awareness and Acceptance of the New Normal Setup, Open and Patient Communication with Parents, Time Management , Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle, Active Coping via Trainings and Seminars and Other Stress-Relieving Activities.

Table 2. Coping Mechanisms of Kindergarten Teachers in the New Normal



Positive and Active Mind-setting. When someone is positive and active and have a positive outlook in life. All the challenges can change one's perspective in life which could hinder one's performance in work or in daily living. As a teacher, it is a must that you have a positive perspective in life despite the changes that are happening in the world because what you feel can be conveyed to the people you are interacting with. It is hard for both the student and the teachers as to how they can cope up with the challenges they have experience, as Respondent 5 mentioned –

I have overcome these challenges in this new normal through having a positive mind and through cooperating with the people who are willing to share their expertise and who are willing to extend their help. Coping up with the new normal was a step-by-step process since we have put the face-to-face teaching and learning on pause.

Among other things, studies have shown that an optimistic attitude can help individuals manage stress, increase general wellbeing, and perhaps even stimulate the immune system. Furthermore, studies have also investigated indications that a pleasant outlook can improve the capacity to study and solve issues.

According to Respondent 8, as we teach, we learn. We can learn to thrive in our new normal set-up. If we have the mind-set and the resources we need to adapt, we can grow. They should have a positive mind-set.

During these tough times, these instructors' perseverance, positivity, active mindset, passion, and commitment have become a source of inspiration for others, all for the sake of gaining information for their students. Despite the challenges, this is an unshakable commitment to work with Filipino teachers to provide high-quality education (Garcia, 2020). It is the duty of a teacher to teach their students in such a way that they can feel their presence despite the distance occurring. By doing so, teachers used strategies in order to abruptly cope up with the problems they have experienced as such having a positive outlook in life and being active.

Awareness and Acceptance of the New Normal Setup. No one ever expected that the world could be struck by a virus, which is why no one is prepared for what this virus could bring. There are a lot of changes happening and one of them is the conduct of classes. Teachers faced the challenges this pandemic has brought to the education system with such acceptance –

Respondent 3 states that, through acceptance, although this is the challenging man kaayo siya, so wala namiy mahimo. Kay this is our job, diri man mi nabuhi, diri man jud nagsalig among family. Wala namiy mahimo. Accept reality and this normal. (Through acceptance, although this is very challenging, we don't have a choice. Since this is our job, our family relies on this so we really don't have a choice but to accept the reality and that this is normal).

Respondent 1 claims that, stress pud sya pero kailangan namo sya e adapt, kanang acceptance nalang unta no, kay naa naman ni no. (It is very stressful but we cannot do anything but to accept it because it is what it is now).

Kindergarten teachers accept the changes as they have no choice because it is their duty to teach and provide quality education to their students. Movkebayeva, Derijan, Khamitova, & Akhmetova (2018) claims that it is critical to understand how educators, who are the primary facilitators of education, adjusted to this change and the problems they experienced as part of their preparedness for the future. Teachers should use this experience as a lesson that events like this could actually happen again and that as a teacher, they must be prepared as they are the front liners in terms of serving the children's needs.

Open and Patient Communication with Parents. Due to the circumstances where the teachers are distant with their students, it is the duty of the parents to provide more help and assistance to their child's education. They must strengthen their will to provide education to their children despite the hindrance given by the pandemic. Having a great relationship with the parents can lessen the work and stress of a kindergarten teacher.

Respondent 7 states that, "I usually relieve my stress through eating or having small talks with the parents about how their children are holding up. It makes me happy."

Having small talks with the parents concerning the performance of the child at home can actually help in coping up with the stress and loneliness a teacher can feel. According to UNICEF (2020), it is critical to interact with parents in a continuous, open, patient, and methodical manner, not simply when it is necessary. Even before that there is a face to face class, having a great relationship and interaction with the parents can bring a harmonious environment not just for the students but also for the teachers. Respondent 2 and 10 also mentioned how important it is to assist the parents on how they could teach their children at home and how to be patient –

Akong gibuhay for coping akong gimeeting ang ginikanan ug ang ginikanan ang akong gitudloan. (I conduct meetings with the parents to teach them how to teach their children properly to cope up with the challenges in modular instruction.)

Patient lang jud ug kaning communicate sa parents from time to time ginamonitor sila sa ilang modules. (Having patience and communication with the parents.)

Schools must also ensure that all parents and kids, including the most vulnerable, have access to crucial information by ensuring that communication is developmentally appropriate and accessible to all students, including persons with impairments, as mentioned by UNICEF (2020). Although it is the job of the teachers to deliver knowledge despite the distance, it could really be a big help for them to have the 100% cooperation of the parents to elevate the workload.

Time Management. Due to the changes happening in the world, kindergarten teachers have a heavier workload such as printing modules, checking them one by one, approaching the parents, and so on. This is a lot to handle for kindergarten teachers which is why time management is really the key in order to keep up with the busy schedule. According to Respondent 6 –

Organize and plan everything. Managing your time is important in dwelling on this new normal.

In order for a teacher to balance their work and their personal life, they organize and plan everything ahead of time to avoid problems. This strengthened the study made by Ventayin (2018) that despite their limited experience in distance education, such as technical skills, time management, knowledge, training, and attitude in online education, teachers were still able to cope with the trends in distance learning.

According to Respondent 5, the work of a teacher is not only limited in the four corners of the classrooms. One way that I can balance work and personal/family time is time-management. I make sure to finish all the paper works in time at school.

It is very usual for teachers to bring home some work in their home but in the new normal where their house is also their workplace, it can create havoc to their system as an educator and a parent. Numerous studies have indicated that teachers are prone to stress when they lack support and time when instructing kids, particularly now that the world is undergoing a pandemic (Pittman & Gaines, 2015). It is very helpful for kindergarten teachers to have their time schedule for every work that they have without compromising the quality time they should spend with their family.

Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle. Governments were forced to make quick judgments as safe place and stay-at-home commands were issued, leaving many educators with little to no adequate notice or guidelines regarding how and for how long they would be instructing their pupils while at home. Teachers are confronted with unique challenges in the aftermath of COVID-19, which includes disruption of existing educational practices and procedures, the sudden progression from in-person classroom instruction to distance education, the psychological strain of solitary confinement due to social distancing initiatives, and lack of certainty about individual health and wellbeing. Respondent 5 and 8 sees the importance of having a healthy lifestyle in order to cope up with the stress and challenges brought upon by Covid 19 –

There are a lot of ways to relieve stress such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle in this time of new normal, watching positive videos, and spending enough time with my family.

Learning to accept the new normal way of life, and boosting the immune system so that I can work well and be productive.

Teacher and student well-being are frequently discussed in tandem since teacher well-being is linked to both teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Becker, Goetz & Ranellucci, 2014). Workload, organizational support, school connectedness, satisfaction with professional learning opportunities, and personal experiences such as stress, life fulfillment and happiness, and health can all play a role in teacher wellness and wellbeing, whether positive or negative (Song & Zhang, 2020). Especially in times like this wherein having a good immune system and healthy body is important to avoid getting infected, it is twice as important to teachers to maintain a healthy lifestyle as they are also considered as front liners who meet and interact with people on a daily basis.

Active Coping via Trainings and Seminars. Technologically speaking, kindergarten teachers are not equipped with the skills needed for the online class and distance learning, they are not trained for that. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the educational system, transforming classrooms and learning on

a daily basis. Educators must navigate a continuously changing world, with the health of students, instructors, and the community as a whole at a distance. With such reasons, kindergarten teachers rely on seminars, training, and webinars online to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge which is needed in this time of chaos. Respondent 8 testifies that –

By diligently learning new things especially the technology and online tools that we're going to use in this online distance learning. A sudden change is hard at first but it is learned in the long run as long as we know how to define and accept things around us.

Additionally, because of the sudden turn of events, teachers are not prepared to engage themselves with blended learning wherein they record the lessons and it will air on the radio or television. Additional burden for them is the unstable network connection and the lack of training in order to achieve the qualification of modular learning. Respondent 6 mentioned that –

Together with my workmates, our school head underwent training to cope up with the new educational systems.

It is such a blessing if the school administration knows the needs and is willing to help the teachers in overcoming the challenges they are facing. The training and seminars attended by the kindergarten teachers will not only be used in this new normal but for the rest of their lives. This claim is in line with Faramarzi et al. (2020) that different features are available on online teaching platforms to help professors and students get the most out of the learning environment. It may also encourage lifelong learning and computer literacy.

Other Stress-Relieving Activities. Numerous studies mentioned that teachers are more likely to be stressed if they are required to use technology with which they are unfamiliar, which is clearly what happened in the first few days of the new normal. It is efficient to have other sources of activities to uplift the mood of the kindergarten teachers as they are facing some sort of challenges at work. Respondents 3, 6, and 7 testify how it helps in coping up with stress and that spending time with their family is also their strategy to cope up with the challenges.

Sa amo kay nahulog nalang nga ang among stress reliever kay ang kaon. (We tend to relieve our stress through eating.)

I relieve my stress through eating and spending time with my family.

I usually relieve my stress through eating or having small talks with the parents about how their children are holding up. It makes me happy.

With this being said, it supports the view of Pittman & Gaines (2015) that eating, hanging out with friends, and having fun with their coworkers are all stress relievers. Lack of resources, time, and support are all major hurdles to teachers' abilities to use and incorporate technology into virtual classes. There are other ways these kindergarten teachers use to cope up with the stress at work. They started their new hobbies such as taking care of plants and animals, singing, going out with family and friends etc.

Starting new habits like reading and morning walks (Respondent 8).

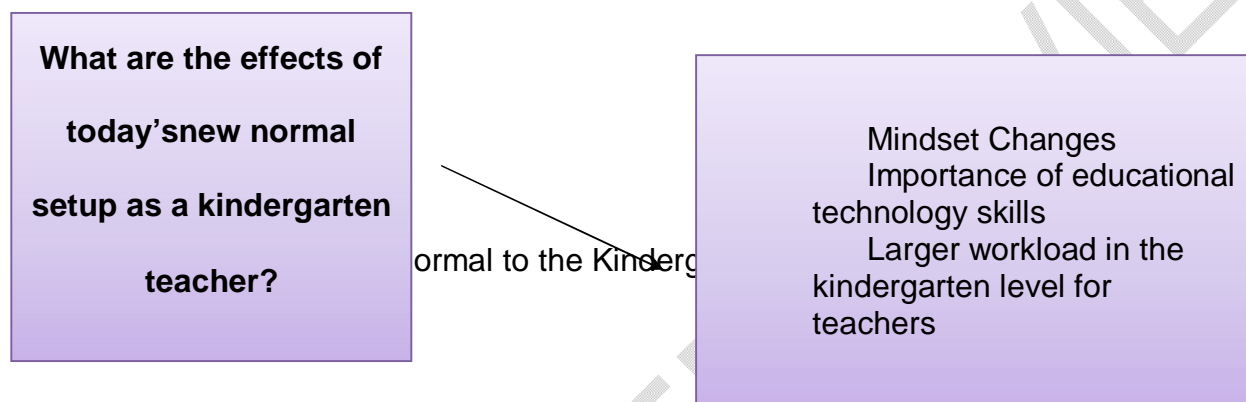
Naga kanta-kanta jud ko ana every udto. Niya every Saturday and Sunday family time jud namo na. (I do sing to release my stress and bond with my family during weekends.) (Respondent 9)

Mulaag lang jud ko. (I release my stress by wandering around.) (Respondent 10)

Every individual has different ways in coping up with their challenges in life. It is such that these kindergarten teachers tend to sway their attention to other things and hobbies in order to relieve the feeling of solidarity as they are away from their usual workspace and away from their students.

4.3. Effects of Today's New Normal Setup to Kindergarten Teachers

This section of the research paper showcases the effects of the new normal setup to the kindergarten teachers. It shows the realizations they have obtained from the challenges they have experienced. The analysis of the data obtained from the respondents results in 3 themes namely: Mindset Changes, Importance of educational technology skills, and Larger workload in the kindergarten level for teachers.



Mindset Changes. The only constant thing in this world is change and it is usual for people who encounter or face a lot of challenges to change their perspective about life and work. Since there is no exact date to when this new normal setup will end, kindergarten teachers have accepted the changes they will encounter while contemplating ways in order to be more productive as a worker and an educator. Respondent 1 realizes how essential it is for a teacher to be flexible and to have a broad knowledge in everything –

Dako sya'g changes, dapat lawakan gud nimo imohang scope of learning, flexible ka, taas imong pasensya, kailangan ang teacher literate jud siya sa technology. (A teacher should have a broad knowledge, flexible with the changes, have a long patience and be literate in terms of technology.)

Additionally, Respondent 9, 4 and 7 stated that through their experiences they have develop their will to help their students more than before –

Kuan maimprove jud kay naa man diri ang pag paningkamot jud nimo nga ang bata makalearn. (It will strengthen your will to improve to help your students learn.)

As a teacher, need nato nga mu adopt sa mga kausaban sa atong palibot kay dili man tungod naglisod ta sa kausaban sa atong education system, dili na ta magwork kay looy pod ang mga bata. (As a teacher, you should be adaptable to the changes in your environment because even though we are struggling with the changes, we cannot stop because the children will suffer.)

We should never give up on tasks given to us because our little learners rely on us kindergarten teachers. We are their stepping stone to their building block of knowledge.

According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) (2020), the pandemic has had a significant and long-term impact on the education system in the Philippines. Due to this, a change in perspective and mindset could really be helpful at work rather than constantly thinking of what is happening and the world which could affect the performance of the kindergarten teacher. Additionally, it does not mean that these kindergarten teachers have no will before to teach the younger but now that there is situation prevailing and that they do not have the concrete authenticity that the children are learning on their own, it fuels their will to improve their skills and way of instruction in order to help the children to learn.

Importance of educational technology skills. Since there is a sudden shift of learning where classes are conducted through online platforms such as Google meets, Zoom, radio broadcast and television, it is beneficial for kindergarten teachers to acquire technological skills in order to adjust to the demands of the new normal setup. Educators' beliefs about instruction were challenged by the Covid-19 pandemic, which impacted all elements of education, including funding, the use of technology, attendance, and so on. It emphasized income disparities and our students' physical and mental abilities, as well as presenting technical challenges to both students and educators.

Respondent 1, a kindergarten teacher teaching using modular instruction believes that – *Siguro sa karon no kay nagkuan man mi offline modular man jud mi nag focus no, siguro sa sunod mag online nami kay para naa miy one on one sa bata, mastorya namo sila Kanang ma virtual namo sila* (In online class, teachers can monitor their students virtually, have one on one talk with them, unlike in offline modular where there is no interaction).

Respondent 8 testifies to how important it is in the new normal to acquire knowledge about technology – *“This new normal set up made me more knowledgeable about technology, more creative and increased my adaptability. This is the new normal. We must unlearn old habits and acquire new skills that we need in this new normal in education.”*

These statements support the claim of Cobo et al (2021) that teachers may use technology to boost their productivity, incorporate valuable digital tools to enhance their students' learning options, and boost student support and participation. Teachers must adjust their approaches and be innovative to keep students involved, regardless of the type of channel utilized (radio, TV, mobile, online platforms, etc.). Acquiring a new set of skills not just for work but also for one to use in a lifetime can be a big help. Teachers may use technology to boost their productivity, incorporate valuable digital tools to enhance their students' learning options, and boost student support and participation (Cobo et al, 2021).

Larger workload in the kindergarten level for teachers. The most prominent effect of the new normal to the kindergarten teachers is the additional workload attached to their daily lives. Since most of the children do not have the resources for online classes, modular learning is their only option. This leaves a pile of paperwork for the teachers to check and to examine in order to assess if it is the work of their student. Respondent 5 and 7 mentioned how challenging it is having additional burden of work during the new normal –

One challenge would be the assurance that the learning competencies would be clear in the given modules and be taken positively by both parents and students. There are instances where there are lacking learning resources that we ought to make ourselves. Another one would be the printing resources such as bond papers, inks, and availability/maintenance of printers.

It is very challenging on my part when I have to prepare and finish all modules and worksheets for the entire week, distribute them and make sure that all parents can receive a complete set of modules as well as to make sure that learning will be transferred to students.

These are only some of the additional workload kindergarten teachers have to face in the new normal. These statements also fuel the statement of Matthews (2020) that some Kindergarten teachers in the Philippines will tell how hard it is to make modules for their students since there aren't enough papers. Doing so much paperwork takes a lot of time out of their daily schedules. This can have a significant impact on the quality of their work. Another statement from Barron et al., (2021) shows that teachers found themselves balancing educating and providing feedback to students virtually. Preparing lessons during this pandemic is far more difficult than before, because the concern is not only to ensure that the learning is transferred to the learners, but also to ensure that it is delivered to them. It should be taken in consideration that if students are suffering with this new normal setup, it is also hard for the teachers because a lot is expected from them as an educator and they are also pressured not just by the administration but also by the parents.

5. CONCLUSION

The researchers have come to the following conclusions based on the primary findings in this study:

1. The kindergarten teachers are evidently challenged because of the pandemic and the shift in the conduct of classes. They were not equipped with the needed skills in modular classes and they have more workloads rather than before when there is a face-to-face classes. Moreover, almost all of the participants complained about the lack of support in terms of resources such as bond paper, ink, printer, laptops, etc.
2. Most kindergarten teachers have no other choice but to adapt and accept the changes in the education system during the new normal. One way of coping up with the challenges they have encountered was through the support of their co-teachers who were sharing the same struggles as them.
3. Due to the challenges they have experienced, the kindergarten teachers have change the way they perceive things. They have also managed to differentiate how modular classes is different from online classes, which in the end, they opted to choose conducting online classes in the next school year.
4. It is not only the students who are suffering in this new normal system of education, teachers also suffer with more workload brought by the modular system and having to conduct classes in a distance setting.
5. Kindergarten years are meant to have interaction in order to develop skills and knowledge but due to the pandemic, it is delivered to the students by modules which add more pressure to the teachers in how they can develop their students in a distance.
6. There is a lack of support in the public kindergarten schools where they only have modular teaching strategies unlike private kindergarten schools where they can conduct virtual classes to interact with their students.

6. IMPLICATION

In the light of the results and the conclusions drawn from the study, the following implications are offered:

1. Training and seminars should be provided by the Department of Education and school's administration to kindergarten teachers in order to fully equip them with skills needed in the new normal. Training/Workshops on: effective virtual teaching, workload management, Modern technological integration for multiple intelligences and effective module creation.
2. Resources should be fully given to kindergarten teachers such as bond papers, ink, laptops/computers, printers and stable internet connection to provide quality education.
3. This research study is an attempt to unveil the challenges experienced by kindergarten teachers. Further studies should be conducted in order to enrich the academic work.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscript

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participant's written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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