

Equipping Teachers to Adapt: A Look into Teachers' Professional Development Programs in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic

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Received: 11 Jun 2022; Received in revised form: 06 Jul 2022; Accepted: 11 Jul 2022

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine public school teachers' experiences and perspectives on different professional development programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also aimed at determining teachers' motivation and barriers in attending TPDs. A multi-faceted survey questionnaire was given to 84 teacher-respondents representing 10 public schools in Tandubas District, Tawi-Tawi, the southernmost province of the Philippines. Prior to this, the questionnaire had undergone validation and reliability testing. Afterward, follow-up interviews were also made with ten selected teacher-respondents for an in-depth appreciation of the context of the data gathered. The result shows that teachers shifted to online courses and webinars during the pandemic. There is also a high frequency of utilization of informal professional development programs such as peer tutoring, coaching, and school-based Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions. Other professional development programs such as formal degrees, reading of professional papers, professional networking, school and classroom observations, conducting education research, and attending conferences were least attended. In terms of topics, most teachers have attended training on students' assessment, module development, school readiness, and safety. The study also found a Significant difference in the professional development experiences of teachers of different educational backgrounds and schools. This means that teachers with higher education tend to avail themselves more and school culture is one factor that encourages teachers to attend professional development programs. The result also shows that most of the teachers joined various TPDs because of the desire to improve their teaching, encouragement from school heads and peers, and usefulness for a job promotion. As to the barriers, most of the teachers mentioned financial constraints, time constraints, and poor internet connectivity as the top three reasons for not attending professional development programs in the past 12 months.

Keywords— *New Normal Education, Teachers' Professional Development, Teachers' Experiences, Teachers' Training*

I. INTRODUCTION

The disruption brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to education is unprecedented. This abrupt change has brought traditional classrooms into virtual or modular for already more than two years. The Philippine Department of Education (2020) has given schools options of choosing modalities such as online, modular, or blended. However, whatever the modality, teachers being at the forefront of education need to be kept abreast with these trends to effectively manage the change.

This pandemic exposed the weakness of our education system. It has led our schools to struggle for

resources and in providing much-needed training opportunities to teachers. These difficulties are compounded by many restrictions imposed such as no face-to-face meetings and travel bans. For decades, the country's dominant model of in-service training had been the face-to-face cascade model in which regional and divisional trainers are trained. They will then be responsible for training teachers in districts and schools (The Philippine Department of Education, 2016). This model is not anymore possible. The difficulties in preparing schools and teachers are due to the unevenness in access to training and resources. For instance, some

private schools were the most affected due to a reduced in enrollees and the high cost of maintaining the new modality. As for the Philippine public schools, the arduous preparation has led to many months of postponement of the schools' reopening.

Undoubtedly, this new reality in education calls for upskilling and re-tooling of teachers' competence necessary for them to successfully transverse this new world. Teachers need a new way of delivering content, managing classrooms, craft self-learning modules, and assessments. This can only be done by providing them with effective Teachers Professional Development (TPD) programs. Months of no mobility may also have not been favorable to teachers who have a mindset to always grow in the profession (Anchol & Arrieta, 2021). In addition, every professional in the Philippines is mandated by law to regularly undergo continuous professional development (RA 10912).

The researchers believe that the pandemic may have led to the difference in the professional development experiences of teachers due to the difference in training opportunities, resources, and availability of technology, among others. Hence, this study was conducted to determine actual teachers' experiences and their perspectives on professional development programs during the pandemic with the hope of providing insights for planning relevant and effective Teachers' Professional Development Programs (TPDs). This study aimed at exploring teacher experiences with the teachers' development programs during the pandemic. Specifically:

1. What were the public school teachers' experiences in the teachers' development programs in terms of frequency and topics attended?
2. Which of these Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) has the most and the least impact as perceived by teachers?
3. What are the perceived barriers to Teachers' Professional Development (TPD)?
4. What are the factors that motivate teachers in spending time on Teachers' Professional Development?
5. Is there a significant difference in the experiences of teachers in the Teachers' Professional Development by school, length of service, and highest educational attainment?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study used a mixed-method research design. To collect needed data, it made use of

researcher-made survey questionnaires on teachers' experiences and perceptions in the professional development programs for the past 12 months.

Research Respondents. This study was conducted in the Division of Tawi-Tawi, the southernmost province of the Philippines. Schools included are located in rural areas. The participants were 84 teachers representing 10 public elementary and secondary schools. These schools have been using modular learning for the past two years. The selection of schools is purposive based on the number of teachers and accessibility to researchers. Ten respondents were selected for a follow-up interview to have an in-depth understanding of the data collected.

Research Instruments. The survey questionnaire used in this study consists of four parts - demographic profile, professional development experiences, teachers' perception of the impact of TPD programs, and open-ended questions on teachers' motivation and barriers to attending TPDs. The classification of Teachers Professional Development is adapted with modification from OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 report (Jerrim & Sims, 2019). Before the final administration, the questionnaire had undergone face validation by three experts in the field of education and was revised based on the experts' suggestions. The questionnaire was also field-tested and was found to be reliable using Cronbach alpha with a value of 0.84.

Data Gathering Procedure. First and foremost, the researchers asked for the permission of the school heads and the consent of the teacher-respondents. The researcher then personally administers the survey questionnaire to the respondents. An online survey using google forms was utilized for distant respondents. Follow-up interviews were made with selected teacher-participants to triangulate the data collected. Afterward, the result was tallied for statistical analysis. Statistical tools used include percentage, mean, and Kruskal-Wallis Test. Thematic analysis was utilized for the analysis of the qualitative data.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows public school teachers' experiences in the different teachers' professional development. The result shows that attending online courses and webinars has the highest mean frequency ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 0.972$). This means according to the teachers' respondents, they have attended on average of 2-3 webinars and online courses these past 12 months. This was followed by peer coaching ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 0.851$) where the teachers consult other peers on issues relating to teaching. Follow up interview shows this was done in an informal setting. Third most

frequently attended form of TPDs was face to face seminars (M = 1.16, SD = 0.936) and school-based Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions (M = 1.16, SD = 0.826). Other professional development programs such as formal degree programs (M = 0.33, SD = 0.473), reading of professional papers (M = 0.51, SD = 1.189), professional networking (M = 0.67, SD = 0.596), school and classroom observation (M = 0.12, SD = 0.329), and conducting education researchers and attending conferences (M = 0.80, SD = 0.324) were rated below 1.0. This means that only a few of the teacher-participants have engaged in these professional development programs over the past 12 months. In addition, the least participation of teachers in action research is because of the high level of technicalities needed. This finding is similar to that of Tindowen, Guzma & Macanang (2019) and Toquero (2021). Overall, the teacher-respondents have attended an average of 8.79 (SD = 0.72) different Teacher Professional Development Programs during the past 12 months. The result supports the findings of Henry and Namhla (2020) that teachers usually engaged in both informal staff-development programs and formal school-based in-service programs. Hence school administrations should utilize and support both programs to improve their teachers' competencies.

Table 1. Elementary Teachers' Experiences on the Different Teachers' Professional Development Programs (TPDs) During the Past 12 Months

Teachers Professional Development Programs	Mean	S.D.
Formal program (e.g. diploma/master's/doctoral program)	0.33	0.473
Seminar/workshop attended (district, division, regional, national and international)	1.16	0.936
School-based/LAC Sessions	1.16	0.826
Online courses/Webinar	2.38	0.972
Reading professional literatures (books, journals, research papers, blogs, etc.)	0.51	1.189
Peer coaching/ mentoring as part of a formal school arrangement	1.66	0.851
Participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for the professional development	0.67	0.596
Observation visit to other school/classroom	0.12	0.329
Conduct action researches and attend Education conferences	0.80	0.324
Total/Average	8.79	0.72

Table 2 shows elementary school teachers' attendance in professional development listed by topics. The result shows the top three topics attended by teachers were on student assessment under the new normal (n = 24, 23%) followed by trainings on module development (n = 21, 20%) and school readiness and safety (n = 17, 16%). Other trainings participated by the public school teachers include reading strategies (n = 16, 15%), teaching strategies (n = 12, 12%), information and communication technology (n = 6, 6%) and others (n = 8, 8%).

Table 2. Professional Development Programs Attended by Public Elementary Teachers by Topics

Teachers Professional Development Programs Topics	frequency	Percentage
Assessment	24	23%
Reading Strategies	16	15%
Module Development	21	20%
School Readiness and Safety	17	16%
Teaching strategies (other than reading)	12	12%
Information and Communication Technology	6	6%
others	8	8%

The teacher-respondents were also asked to rate the effectiveness of nine professional development programs. This is based on the applicability of these programs to their teaching these past 12 months. The finding shows that only four out of nine programs were rated as Somewhat effective. These are formal programs such as taking graduate courses (M = 4.94, SD=1.801), face-to-face seminar-workshop (M = 4.95, SD = 1.917), school-based LAC sessions (M = 5.22, SD = 1.587) and peer coaching and mentoring (M = 4.66, SD = 1.642). A high frequency of attendance in school-based LAC sessions is in line with the Department of Education (DepEd) guidelines. However, it is still far below the recommended frequency of 1-2 times a week (DepEd Order No. 35 s. 2016).

Table 3. Elementary Teachers' Perceptions on the Impact of different Teachers' Professional Development Programs

Teachers Professional Development Programs	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Formal program (e.g. diploma/master's/doctoral program)	4.94	1.801	Somewhat Effective
Seminar/workshop attended (district, division, regional, national and international)	4.95	1.917	Somewhat Effective
School-based/LAC Sessions	5.22	1.587	Somewhat Effective
Online courses/Webinar	4.13	2.113	Neither effective nor ineffective
Reading professional literatures (books, journals, research papers, blogs, etc.)	4.44	1.765	Neither effective nor ineffective
Peer coaching/ mentoring as part of a formal school arrangement	4.66	1.642	Somewhat Effective
Participation in a network of teachers formed specifically for the professional development	4.07	1.910	Neither Effective Nor Ineffective
Observation visit to other school/classroom	4.16	2.076	Neither effective nor ineffective
Conduct action researches and attend Education conferences	3.74	2.142	Neither effective nor ineffective

Legend: Highly Ineffective (1.00-1.86), Ineffective (1.87-2.72), Somewhat Ineffective (2.73-3.58), Neither Effective nor Ineffective (3.59-4.44), Somewhat Effective (4.45- 5.30), Effective (5.31- 6.16), Highly Effective (6.17- 7.00)

The rest of the programs were rated Neither effective nor Ineffective. These include program such as online courses and webinars (M = 4.13, SD = 2.113), reading of professional materials related to teaching (M = 4.44, SD = 1.765), participation in a professional network (M = 4.07, SD = 1.910), observation visits to other school or classroom (M = 4.16, SD = 2.076) and conducting of action research and conferences (M = 3.74, SD = 2.142). It can be seen from the table that engaging in action research is rated as the least effective in contrast to the findings of Aguilar-De Borja (2018) who found positive teachers' perceptions in the impact of action research in teaching. A follow-up interview shows that this was because of the technicalities needed and the perceived lack of incentives.

Teachers' professional development experiences were also compared among schools and demographic profiles such as educational attainment and length of service. The finding shows that there is a Significant difference in the professional development experiences of teachers of different education backgrounds ($p = 0.000$). Teachers who have higher educational attainment tend to engage more in the different teachers' professional development programs. When compared by the length of teaching experiences, it was found to be Not Significant ($p = 0.333$). This indicates that irrespective of the length of service, the teacher-respondents have similar engagement in professional development programs in contrast to the findings of Nugraha and Maulida (2021) who found that younger teachers tend to have a greater chance of availing professional development programs. On the other hand, data shows a Significant difference in the professional development experiences of teachers when compared by schools. The result shows that teachers in some schools are more engaged in TPDs compared to others. The result implies that support from school leaders and peers encouraged teachers to attend various professional development programs.

Table 4. Elementary Teachers' Experience in the Teacher Professional Development Program Compared by Length of Service, Education Attainment, and School

Variables		Mean rank	p-value	Interpretation	Decision to H_0
Avepdex	bachelor	33.53	0.000	Significant	Reject
	MA Units	56.37			
	Masters	54.92			
Avepdex	2-12	13.00	0.355	Not significant	Accept
	13-22	7.67			
	23-32	7.00			
	33-42	10.72			
	43-52	4.50			
Avepdex	School 1	26.23	0.000	Significant	Reject
	School 2	19.94			
	School 3	27.96			
	School 4	67.08			
	School 5	32.00			
	School 6	54.44			
	School 7	39.28			
	School 8	56.30			

We asked teachers about what motivates them to join professional development programs over the past 12 months. The result shows that most of the teachers joined various TPDs because of the desire to improve their teaching ($n = 29, 28%$). This is consistent with the findings of Apova and Arbaugh (2017). Followed by encouragement from school heads and peers ($n = 24, 23%$) and the usefulness of TPDs for job promotion ($n=20, 19%$). Some teacher-respondents also mentioned the accessibility of TPD programs as factors that encourage them to attend such as the use of online platforms for webinars and modular learning delivery of some local colleges and universities. While some teachers joined the professional development programs as part of their fulfillment as professional teachers ($n = 12, 12%$).

Table 5. Public Elementary Teachers' Motivations in Attending Different Teachers' Professional Development Programs

Teachers Professional Development Programs Topics	frequency	Percentage
Desire to Improve Teaching	29	28%
accessibility	19	18%
Encouragement from school heads and peers	24	23%
promotion	20	19%
Personal fulfillment	12	12%

In terms of barriers to joining teachers' professional development programs, ten themes emerged from the teachers' responses. Most of the teacher-respondents mentioned financial constraints ($n=20, 18%$) as the top reason. This same barrier also emerged in the study of Zhang, Shi, and Lin (2019). This was followed by time constraints ($n = 15, 13%$) and poor internet access ($n = 15, 13%$). Other challenges encountered by teachers in their attendance to different TPD programs are lack of motivation ($n = 9, 8%$), lack of opportunities ($n = 9, 8%$), lack of support from school heads ($n = 8, 7%$), lack of needed resources such as gadgets and devices ($n = 8, 7%$), distance ($n = 7, 6%$), and high amount of workload ($n = 7, 6%$). Similar themes have emerged in the study of Chin et. al. (2022) and Nugraha and Maulida (2021).

Table 6. Public Elementary Teachers' Barriers to Attending Different Teachers' Professional Development Programs

Teachers Professional Development Programs Topics	frequency	Percentage
Lack of motivation	9	8%
Time constraints	15	13%
Financial constraints	20	18%
Lack of support from school heads	8	7%
Poor internet access	15	13%
Lack of resources	8	7%
distance	7	6%
Restrictions brought by pandemic	14	13%
High amount of workload	7	6%
Lack of Opportunities	9	8%

IV. CONCLUSION

The pandemic has transformed education at all levels and places. The researchers believe that the COVID-19 pandemic may have led to the difference in professional development experiences of teachers due to differences in training opportunities, resources, and availability of technology. Hence, this study was conducted to determine actual teachers' experiences and their perspectives on professional development programs during the pandemic. The researchers also look into motivations and barriers with the hope of providing insights for planning relevant and effective Teachers' Professional Development Programs (TPDs). Eighty-four public school teachers were surveyed using a multi-faceted questionnaire. Out of these, ten teachers were selected for a follow-up interview.

The result shows that teachers shift to online courses and webinars ($M = 2.38, SD = 0.972$) during the pandemic. There is also high frequency of utilization of informal professional development programs such as peer

tutoring and coaching ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 0.851$) and school-based learning action cell (LAC) sessions. Third most frequently attended form of TPDs were face to face seminars (mean=1.16) and school-based Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions ($M = 1.16$, $SD = 0.826$). Other professional development programs such as formal degree programs ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.473$), reading of professional papers ($M = 0.51$, $SD = 1.189$), professional networking ($M = 0.67$, $SD = 0.596$), school and classroom observation ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.329$), and conducting education researchers and attending conferences ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.80$, 0.324) were rated below 1.0. The finding implies that school leaders should utilized both formal and informal development programs to improve teachers' teaching competencies.

As to the perceived effectiveness of different TPD programs, only four out of nine programs were rated as Somewhat Effective. These are formal program such as taking graduate courses (mean = 4.94, $SD = 1.801$), face-to-face seminar-workshops (mean = 4.95, $SD = 1.917$), school-based LAC sessions (mean = 5.22, $SD = 1.587$) and peer coaching and mentoring ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.642$). The rest of the TPD programs were rated Neither Effective nor Ineffective. In terms of motivation, most of the teachers joined various TPDs because of the desire to improve their teaching ($n = 29$, 28%), encouragement from school heads and peers ($n = 24$, 23%) and the usefulness of TPDs for job promotion ($n = 20$, 19%). Some teachers also mentioned the accessibility of TPD programs as one of the factors that encouraged them to attend. These include the use of online platforms for webinars and modular learning delivery offered by some local colleges and universities. However, top barriers to joining teachers' professional development programs include financial constraints ($n = 20$, 18%), time constraints ($n = 15$, 13%) and poor internet access ($n = 15$, 13%). Furthermore, this study found a significant difference in the teachers' experiences in professional development programs by schools ($p = 0.0000$) and education attainment ($p = 0.000$). These show that teachers who have higher educational attainment tend to engage more in the different teachers' professional development programs. Similarly, significant difference by school implies that school culture and support are important factors in teachers' attendance to TPDs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researchers acknowledge the contribution of school heads and public school teachers of Tandubas District, Province of Tawi-Tawi who participated in the validation, actual data gathering, and interviews. Their sharing of

experiences and insights was valuable for this work to become materialized.

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