

# NARRATIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS ON IN-PERSON CLASSES DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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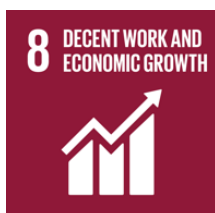
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate journey of teachers adapting to the challenges of the new normal teaching-learning landscape. It employed qualitative inquiry within the narrative tradition. Through immersion in the personal narratives of eight educators, I recognized the profound difficulties that early childhood teachers face in crafting effective strategies to address learning lag, academic unpreparedness, and classroom behavior. Further, observing their progression through three distinct phases of transition in adapting to the new normal – beginning, middle, and end, I noticed moments of adaptation with action in between. Moreover, the implications highlight the need for targeted interventions, emphasizing professional development, collaborative learning communities, and emotional support. Future research avenues include longitudinal studies and comparative analyses across different educational contexts. This study underscores the importance of supporting educators in navigating the complexities of the new normal advocating for initiatives that empower their professional growth and well-being.

**Keywords:** *Narratives of Early Childhood Educators, In-person Classes, New Normal Transition Period, Phenomenology, Philippines*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Teachers experienced unpreparedness in facing rapid changes in the new normal learning setting (Kundu & Bej, 2021). Indeed, teachers are plunged into different struggles in terms of preparing instructional methodologies to adapt to the new normal teaching condition (De Vera et al., 2021). In various countries, this problem has also been observed.

In Australia, many educators shared that they felt angry, frustrated, and distressed when they knew schools would re-open. They expressed feeling tired and anxious in transitioning from hybrid learning to in-person classes (Ryan et al., 2023). Teachers in the United States of America complained that pupils' educational lag was also a concern for many early childhood educators during the transition period (Soland, 2022). In England, the short attention span among pupils beset teachers as they adjust to the new Normal (Busby, 2023).

In the Philippines, teachers found difficulties in adapting to the challenges in the new normal teaching-learning situation, particularly related to the delivery of instruction, access to technologies or gadgets needed for teaching, internet connectivity, additional non-teaching tasks assignments were some of the challenges faced by educators (Ramoso & Cruz, 2024). Filipino teachers are trapped by the difficulty related to the complexity of assessment, instructional delivery and the digital divide (De Villa & Manalo, 2020). In addition, the expression of teachers that teaching in the new normal condition has triggered their commitment to teaching as a vocation is a manifestation of their difficulty in adjusting to the new normal teaching-learning setting (Geverola et al., 2022).

The difficulties of teachers in adjusting to the new normal educational situation may lead to their mental stress and burnout such as feeling tired and anxious (McLean et al., 2023; Modan, 2022). Once this problem remains unaddressed, teachers tend to temporarily leave their jobs or permanently leave their profession (Wiltshire, 2023). This urgency is coupled with the gap that there is limited study exploring the problem through the stories of the teachers in this phenomenon. It is for this reason that I conducted this study.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to describe and narrate the experiences of Early Childhood Educators during the face-to-face transition period. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are early childhood educators' experience with the face-to-face transition period?
2. How do teachers prepare themselves for the transition from online to face-to-face classes?
3. How do teachers cope with the challenges that they face?
4. With teachers' experiences, what lessons and insights have they learned?

### **Significance of the Study**

This narrative study aimed to explore early childhood educators' experiences. The researcher seeks to carefully narrate and share their collective experiences, providing a comprehensive account that tells the story of these teachers during the transition period of in-person classes in the Philippines. This study seeks to shed light on the specific issues early childhood educators face during this transition.

### **Limitation and Delimitation**

This study focused on exploring the lived experiences of early childhood educators as they adapted to the demands of the new normal in the teaching-learning environment. It specifically examined the personal narratives of eight teachers, emphasizing the strategies they used to address learning gaps, student academic unpreparedness, and behavioral challenges. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach grounded in the narrative tradition, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the participants' individual journeys. The participants were early childhood teachers, and the study was situated in Digos City. The study traced the progression of the teachers through three phases of adaptation: beginning, middle, and end, capturing their reflections and actions throughout the transition process.

However, the study has certain limitations. It did not consider other influencing variables such as school policies, parental involvement, socioeconomic factors, or differences in school infrastructure that may also affect teacher adaptation. The number of participants was limited to eight, which restricts the generalizability of the findings across broader educational settings or teacher populations. Additionally, since the study utilized a

qualitative narrative approach, it focused on subjective experiences rather than quantifiable outcomes, making it unsuitable for drawing statistical conclusions. These delimitations suggest that while the study offers rich insights into individual experiences, broader validation through quantitative or mixed-method studies is recommended for future research.

## **2.0 METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design within the narrative tradition. According to Crossman (2020), qualitative research emphasizes existence and meanings not measured by numbers and collects data to help us understand social life by studying targeted populations or places. This study also conducted an in-depth interview to gain a deeper understanding of the early childhood experiences during the transition period of in-person classes. Moreover, the narrative approach was used in this study because it focuses on exploring human experiences by retelling the research participants' experiences comprehensibly to understand social issues (Bhandari, 2020). The narrative approach was well suited to this study, for its goal was to narrate the experiences of early childhood educators during the transition period of in-person classes. The raw data were the research participant's stories, experiences, and challenges. Also, through this approach, the participants could reveal themselves, their voices were heard, and they could understand their experiences in a disciplined way.

### **Participants**

The inclusion criteria in choosing the research participants in this study were the following: they were early childhood educators who currently work in Digos City; they have to be public school teachers; they have been early childhood educators for at least three years; and had been present during the pandemic up to the transition period of in-person classes. In gathering data, this study employed in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion. Four (4) of the eight research participants took part in the in-depth interviews, while the remaining four (4) participated in the focus group discussion. This arrangement was based on the participants' preferences—some opted for individual interviews as they felt more comfortable sharing their experiences privately. Others chose to join the focus group discussion, as they found it easier to relate and open up in a group setting where they could connect with the experiences shared by fellow educators. As for the total number of participants, data saturation was achieved. According to Creswell (2018), a minimum of seven participants is sufficient, provided the researcher utilizes effective probing questions.

### **Sampling Technique**

This study utilized the purposive sampling technique to select eight research participants. According to Denieffe (2020), purposive sampling is used to gain an in-depth understanding and explore experiences and contexts.

### **Data Source**

The participants in this study underwent interviews utilizing a carefully crafted semi-structured interview guide that experts had validated. The purpose of employing a semi-structured interview guide was to delve into and comprehend the experiences of the research participants effectively. Throughout the interview process, the participants were encouraged to respond openly and unrestrictedly to foster a seamless and natural flow of conversation that facilitated the data collection.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Research was complete with data collection. Hence, this part is considered one of the most critical research sections. I followed procedures to ensure that I extracted accurate information from the participants. First, I secured to obtain the HCD-CREC Certificate of Approval for the Initial Interview and an endorsement letter from the Dean of the Graduate School before the data gathering. Data collection began after the research ethics committee and the Dean of the graduate school gave the certificate and the endorsement letter. I also sent a letter to the Schools Division Superintendent of Digos City. I asked permission to conduct the study and select early childhood educators as research participants.

After obtaining permission, I gave the letter of consent to the participants. I scheduled the in-depth interviews at a designated time and location after receiving their permission to participate. I also followed the same process for the focus group discussion participants.

For the in-depth interviews (IDI), these were short conversations lasting around twenty to thirty-five minutes. These one-on-one talks were essential for the research, where participants shared their stories and thoughts in detail. We met face-to-face, and the interview was conducted where the participants felt safe and comfortable. With the participants' permission, I recorded what they said and also took written notes. Furthermore, I wrote their responses and experiences in a narrative form to carefully tell a story of their experiences.

In contrast, the focus group discussion (FGD) was a more extended and interactive research method, lasting over an hour and forty minutes. Unlike IDIs, FGDs involve group conversations, allowing a deeper exploration of the research topic. I also recorded the discussion and took notes with the participants' consent. Just like with IDIs, I analyzed the data and narrated their experiences.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

In this research, I narrated the experiences of the research participants in analyzing data. Kiger and Varpi (2020) stated that we would better understand one person's challenges and experiences through narratives. Thus, this process of narrating was an effective strategy for this research study. In my study, I used a method inspired by Creswell (2018) to analyze and interpret the data through a narrative process. This approach focuses on individuals with unique stories and life experiences and gathers their narratives from different sources (Butina, 2015). There are five steps in analyzing qualitative data, according to Creswell (2014). The steps are Organizing data, looking at the data, coding the data, categorizing the data, and data interpretation.

First, I organized the data that I gathered from the in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). I narrated the interviews and ensured that my data were in a format I could efficiently work with. Through this, I laid the groundwork for a structured and systematic analysis. This step helped me to get a clear view of what I had to work with. After getting the data organized, I began reading it thoroughly. I read and re-read the interviews or stories to understand them better. I made notes and wrote summaries to capture the main ideas. I listened to the audio recordings and took notes to see similarities between the participants' answers; this helped me to become familiar with the data.

Next, I narrated the research participants' experiences. Coding involves picking important or similar parts and giving them labels or codes. Labeling the answers of the research participants into codes made it easy to find and understand their answers. Coding helped me to sort the data into different groups or categories based on their content. With the participants' answers that I coded, I took the next step of categorizing them. I categorized the participants' experiences and arranged them chronologically to tell a story. These made me understand that the research participants had similar experiences.

Lastly, I made an interpretation based on the results during the categorization and reduction of the data. I gained a deeper understanding of the data through the themes established after coding, categorizing, and simplifying. As a result, I created a narrative of the participant's experiences. To ensure the accuracy of my findings, I reviewed and refined the written narratives. This process involved critically evaluating and improving the story of the participants to ensure that they accurately represented the data. Finally, I reported the results of the data analysis clearly and concisely. Through this rigorous approach, I uncovered meaningful insights from the data, shedding light on childhood educators' unique stories and experiences during the transition period of in-person classes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In a qualitative research study, the researcher plays a central role in gathering, narrating, and exploring the lived experiences of participants. This process was no easy task, as it involved the sharing of personal stories and emotions. I made sure that the participants' information remained secure throughout the data collection process, knowing that one of my core responsibilities was to protect their confidentiality (Sutton & Austin, 2015). My roles in this study were many—I served as the interviewer, facilitator, recorder, transcriber, data analyst, and verifier. I began by preparing a semi-structured interview guide, which was validated by experts. Before the data gathering, I reached out to the participants via text, email, and formal letters, informing them of the research goals, the nature of their participation, and the specific questions to be asked. They were also informed of the schedule and location of the interviews and discussions. As a facilitator, I worked on building trust with the participants, making sure they

felt comfortable enough to share their stories openly. I paid attention not only to their words but also to their non-verbal cues, asking follow-up questions when needed to explore their responses further.

Beyond conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, I also documented the conversations by taking notes and securing audio recordings, always with the participants' consent. Afterward, I transcribed their responses verbatim, carefully reading and listening to every detail to capture the essence of their experiences. These transcripts were then analyzed, and the participants' narratives were presented from start to finish, highlighting key points and insights. To ensure accuracy, I took on the role of data verifier by allowing participants to review their transcripts and confirm the content. Open communication was maintained throughout, giving them the chance to clarify or correct any information. After verification, I collected the transcripts, underscoring my commitment to data integrity and the ethical standards of qualitative research.

### Trustworthiness

It is essential in a research study to establish trustworthiness. To do so, the data collected must be credible, confirmable, transferable, and dependable (Moon et al., 2016). Credibility ensures the accurate representation of participants' experiences, confirmability reduces researcher bias, transferability allows findings to apply in similar contexts, and dependability ensures consistency throughout the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical Considerations are principles that adhere to the research participants' rights, dignity, and welfare (World Health Organization, 2022). I also adhered to the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) policies under the Department of Science and Technology (DOST). In this research study, I carefully observed and committedly followed the Ethical standards set by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Holy Cross of Davao College. To ensure the safety of the research participant, I considered the following ethical considerations: social value, informed consent, risks, benefits, safety, privacy and confidentiality of information, justice, transparency, qualification of the researcher, adequacy of facilities, and community involvement.

**Anonymity.** This refers to protecting identities of respondents in order to preserve the richness and integrity of the data (Saunders et al., 2025). In the context of this study, I made sure that the participants' identity was not revealed. Any trace of identification for the respondents were kept and assigned with codes so that their identity would not be divulged.

**Confidentiality.** Data Privacy Act, known as Republic Act No. 10173, aims to protect all kinds of information freely given. To adhere to this Republic Act, I protected the privacy and confidentiality of the data collected. I used code names throughout the study, and the signatures of the research participants were covered to protect their identity. I secured the data collected on a password-protected hard drive or flash drive. Also, I kept the written documents in a locked cabinet to ensure safety and confidentiality. All data will be disposed after a year of completing the study. Audio recordings from the interview on the cell phone used will be deleted, and the soft copies of the transcriptions that were available on the hard drive, Google Drive, and laptop will also be deleted. Printed hard copies will be shredded to dispose of the data collected.

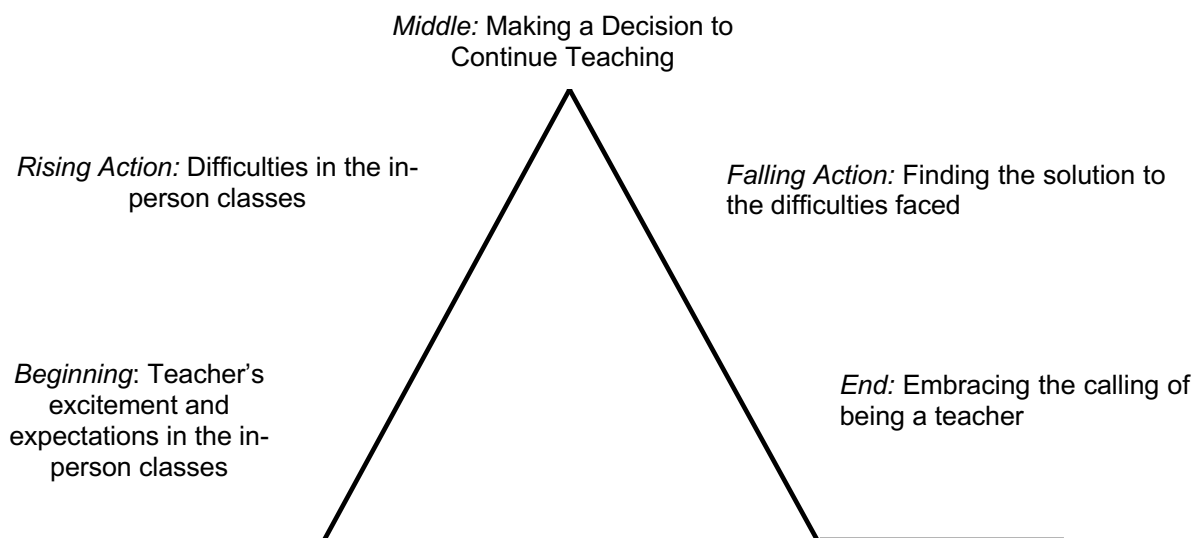
**Informed Consent.** In conducting a research study, it is the researchers' utmost duty to provide complete information to the participants about the aim and the goal of the research they may wish to partake in. To achieve such in this research, I gave the participants, who were early childhood educators, a copy of the informed consent forms. The modality of sending and retrieving the informed consent forms was done face-to-face. The forms provided information on the objective of this study, what they may benefit from participating in this study, and how data will be used and reported. Also, I emphasized that their participation in this study was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw their participation if they wanted to. I upheld the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) regulations or protocols by wearing a face mask and maintaining social distancing for the safety of the research participants upon giving informed consent. These informed consent were distributed to the participants before data collection. To certify the research participant's willingness to participate, they received the 2B form stating the study's objective. Moreover, with their desire to participate, they were also asked to fill out the form by shading, signing, and returning it to the researcher.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experiences of early childhood educators were written in a narrative form to carefully tell the participants' experiences during the transition period of in-person classes. A linear figure was used to present the beginning middle, and end of the story of the participants.

**Figure 1.**

*Summation of Nena, Juana, Marina, Helen, Pedro, Divina, Delia, and Felomina's Experiences*



The transition from remote learning to in-person classes posed numerous challenges for educators, particularly in addressing students' learning gaps and behavioral changes. Teacher Nena observed that many of her students lacked foundational literacy skills such as letter recognition and forming simple shapes. This mirrors findings by York (2023), which reported that 99% of schools in the United States identified learning deficits, particularly in mathematics and English. In addition, Nena noted significant socio-emotional difficulties among her students, including hyperactivity and emotional dysregulation. She expressed in the interview:

*"Mas kiat sila kay pila man ka years wala naka kita ug bata, unya bag-o ang environment sa ilaha. Unya diari ko naglisod sa pag-manage ug pagtudlo sa mga bata."*

Translation

They are more energetic because they haven't seen other children for years, and the environment is new to them. That's why I struggle in managing and teaching them.

Murphy et al. (2023) supports this observation, stating that students who missed key developmental stages during the pandemic often exhibit socio-emotional unpreparedness. In response, Nena cultivated resilience and patience. She actively sought teaching strategies online to meet the diverse needs of her students.

*"Tungod ato naka-realize ko na passion gyud nako ning pagtudlo. Naga-search ko sa internet unsay best practices. Labi na kay mixed baya among mga estudyante — naa pa'y mga bata nga makita nimo nga naay developmental lag. So mangita ko ug paagi para ma-capture ilang attention. Ug labaw sa tanan, gina-strengthen nako akong self para mo-padayon, kay mao na gyud ni akong gipili."*

Translation

Because of this, I realized that teaching is truly my passion. I search for best practices online, especially since we have a diverse group of students, including those with developmental delays. I look for ways to capture their attention, and above all, I strengthen myself to continue, because this is what I've chosen.



Despite the hurdles, Nena embraced her role fully, determined to draw out the best in her students.

Teacher Juana faced similar struggles, particularly with students' short attention spans and lack of foundational academic skills. To address these issues, she designed more engaging and individualized lessons. This extra effort, however, took a toll on her health.

*"Na-ospital gyud ko, ug gi-advise gyud ko nga magpahuway kay sobra gyud ang kakapoy sa trabaho. Nakaingon ko, ihatag pa ba nako akong best sa pagtudlo?"*

Translation

I ended up in the hospital, and I was advised to rest because the workload was too much. I asked myself, should I still give my best to teaching?

Fung et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of emotional regulation for school readiness, providing context for Juana's challenges. Despite experiencing burnout, she chose to stay in the profession. Over time, she realized that prioritizing her well-being was essential to being effective in her role. Lewis et al. (2023) echo this, stating that mental health is key to sustained job performance and emotional resilience.

Teacher Marina, who also served as a kindergarten coordinator, carried the dual burden of administrative and teaching responsibilities. The transition period overwhelmed her with new tasks, leading to heightened stress and fatigue.

*"Daghan kaayo'g additional workloads. Sauna, magtudlo ra man ta. Sauna naay meeting, pero karon ig human sa meeting mura kag gibunal-bunalan."*

Translation

There are so many added workloads now. Before, we only focused on teaching. Meetings before were simple, but now after a meeting, it feels like being bombarded with responsibilities.

Research by Hattie (2017) confirms that excessive workloads negatively affect teacher satisfaction and performance. Despite this, Marina leaned on her faith and reminded herself that teaching was not just a job, but a vocation. Her perseverance allowed her to endure the demands of the new normal.

Teacher Pedro faced an increase in student misbehavior, making classroom management more difficult than before.

*"Ang challenge karon kay ang adjustment sa attitude sa mga estudyante. Mao gyud na akong ginatubag karon. Dugang trabaho pero kinahanglan ka magbuhat ug activities nga angay para nila."*

Translation

The challenge now is adjusting students' attitudes. That's what I'm really facing. It's extra work, but we have to create appropriate activities for them.

He observed signs of aggression and a lack of compliance with basic instructions—issues supported by Zhang et al. (2019), who link screen time and isolation to post-pandemic behavioral problems. Pedro also felt the effects of insufficient institutional support, lacking adequate training for the shift back to in-person learning. Zhao

and Frank (2018) emphasize the necessity of strong professional development systems during times of educational change. To cope, Pedro participated in extracurricular activities like dancing and sought support from colleagues.

Teacher Divina noted her students had trouble socializing after two years of isolation. Many were hesitant to interact with peers and displayed discipline issues, consistent with findings by Murphy et al. (2023) regarding social deprivation and emotional development. To address these issues, Divina sought advice from colleagues and engaged in collaborative discussions.

“Nangayo ko’g advice unsaon sila pag-handle. Unsa pa’y lain nga strategy o technique, unsa’y remedy nga mahimo nimo aron makasabay ang mga bata. Mao to akong way of coping — makigstorya sa uban labi na sa akong mga kauban.”

Translation

I asked for advice on how to handle them. What other strategies or techniques can help students catch up? That’s how I cope—by talking to others, especially my fellow teachers.

Through these exchanges, she learned the value of teamwork and collaboration in creating a more manageable classroom environment. This support system helped her endure the challenges of the transition period.

Teacher Delia, despite her reputation as an efficient and organized educator, found herself struggling with the behavioral challenges of her students. She observed that learners had become significantly more restless and had greater difficulty following instructions compared to pre-pandemic times. She expressed her frustrations candidly:

“Karun, why? Because of their behavior — maka-ingon gyud ko nga mo-undang na ko pagka-maestra. Ngano? Tungod sa ilang batasan. Once ma-handle nimo ang mga bata, makaya ra man gyud ang pagtudlo. Smooth lang gyud labi na kung walay distractions. Kay kung bright ang bata, bright gyud na siya. Pero kung bugoy ug bright, maka-distract gihapon siya sa klase.”

Translation

“Now, why? Because of their behavior — sometimes I feel like quitting teaching. Why? Because of how they act. Once you manage their behavior, teaching becomes manageable. It flows smoothly, especially when there are no distractions. If a child is bright, they’ll excel. But if they’re both naughty and bright, they can still be a major distraction in class.”

Delia recognized that she needed support to manage the return to face-to-face classes. One source of relief came from consistent conversations with her colleagues:

“Makig-uban gyud ko sa akong mga kauban sa trabaho. Mag-storya mi unsaon pag-handle sa mga bata. Tungod ani, mas ni gaan-gaan gyud ang mga butang.”

Translation

I really make it a point to be with my coworkers. We talk about ways to handle the students better. Because of that, things truly become lighter.

This aligns with research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), which highlights that structured classroom environments and strong teacher collaboration can significantly help address behavioral issues in the classroom.

Teacher Helen, a seasoned educator with 25 years of experience, initially felt confident in her ability to manage in-person classes. However, she quickly realized that the energy levels and short attention spans of her students made teaching more exhausting than before. She also struggled with the physical demands of traveling daily to work, which added to her stress.



*“Dili lang sa ge kapoy ko ug tudlo, ge kapoy pud gyud ko sa sige nako ug byahe taga adlaw. Usahay ma uli ko ug dugay kay dili lagi ko gusto mag dal ug trabahoon sa balay. Inig uli sa balay naa pakoy buhaton. Tiguwang nako unya kapoy na gyud para sa akoang kabahin.”*

Translation

Not only that I am tired from teaching, but I also get exhausted from my daily commutes. Sometimes, I come home late because I really don't want to bring my work at home. When I get home, I still have tasks to do. I'm getting older, and it's really tiring for me.

Despite considering early retirement, she ultimately decided to continue teaching to support her family financially.

*Na abot gyud ko sa punto maam, na naka huna huna gyud ko na mo undang. Pero unsaon ta man ang mga panginahanglan sa kinabuhi. Oo kapoy gyud ang pag tudlo pero sige lang para sa anak.”*

Translation

I've reached that point where I've seriously considered quitting. But how do we meet life's needs? Yes, teaching is tiring, but I'll continue for the sake of my children.

Helen found strength in her co-workers, who uplifted her and provided a sense of belonging during challenging times.

Teacher Felomina, who had recently moved to a new school, faced the challenge of adjusting to a different environment while managing the behavioral shifts of her students. Although she had extensive experience, she found that teaching in-person classes after two years required a different approach.

*“Akong preparations nag recollect ko sa akoang mg ana tun-an before. But with all the recollection ay nying ani ang mga gina buhat sa mga teachers. Pero ma shock ka na on the day hala ka no. dili man diay ni mo talab na strategy. Mao na mindset and prayers. Kay maka huna huna ko na makaya kaha ni nila ang mga pictures na mag print ug happy ug sad face. Mag dala ug magic flower, barbie doll, stuff toys, sticker. Unya maka ana ka na hala uy dili man mo efdect sa ilaha ngano sauna mo effect man. More on recollection on strategies gyud.”*

Translation

My preparations involve recalling what I learned from my past experiences. But on the day itself, you'll be shocked to realize these strategies don't always work. That's when mindset and prayers come in. Because I wonder if they'll respond to pictures of happy and sad faces, bringing magic flowers, Barbie dolls, stuffed toys, or stickers. Then you realize that they don't respond the way they used to. It's more about recollecting strategies.

She observed that children needed more structured activities to keep them engaged and focused. Like many of her colleagues, she realized that collaboration with other teachers was key to overcoming these struggles. By adapting her teaching methods and working closely with her peers, Felomina was able to navigate the transition more effectively.

These findings highlight the complex realities faced by early childhood educators during the shift back to face-to-face instruction. Challenges such as increased student misbehavior, widening learning gaps, heavier workloads, and emotional fatigue became prevalent. Many teachers experienced burnout, stress, and anxiety, underscoring the urgent need for systemic support and targeted professional development. Despite these

difficulties, the educators demonstrated remarkable resilience. They drew strength from collaboration with colleagues, adapted their teaching strategies, and remained anchored in their passion for the profession. This reflects findings by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), who emphasize that teachers equipped with adequate training and supported in their well-being are more capable of meeting the evolving demands of the classroom. Ultimately, the unwavering commitment of these educators illustrates that in times of transition, dedication and adaptability are not only beneficial but essential to sustaining quality education. Their stories serve as a powerful reminder that supporting teachers is key to supporting learners, especially in a post-pandemic world.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to the experiences of eight public early childhood educators in Digos City, selected through purposive sampling. As such, the findings may not be generalized to other settings, especially private institutions or different localities. The small sample size and the use of self-reported data through interviews and group discussions may also introduce subjectivity and limit the diversity of perspectives.

### **Implications of the Study**

The following implications for practice emerged from the findings of this study:

First, professional development and training should be prioritized by educational institutions to address the specific needs identified in the study. These include strategies for mitigating learning lag, addressing academic and socio-emotional unpreparedness, and managing classroom behavior in the new normal. Through training sessions, workshops, and seminars, teachers can acquire practical tools and techniques to better support student learning and maintain effective classroom management.

Second, fostering collaborative learning communities is essential. Opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing within and across schools enable early childhood educators to exchange ideas, share experiences, and collectively solve challenges related to adapting teaching practices in evolving contexts.

Third, emotional and mental health support must be strengthened. Given the emotional toll of the transition, schools should provide access to counseling services, mindfulness activities, peer support networks, and initiatives that promote teacher well-being and resilience.

Finally, attention must be given to policy and funding priorities. Policymakers and educational leaders should allocate adequate resources to implement evidence-based practices. This may involve revising existing policies on teacher training and development, funding the creation of support resources, and advocating for systemic reforms that address the needs of early childhood educators in the new normal.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study revealed the challenges and adaptive processes that early childhood educators experienced in navigating the new normal teaching-learning environment. Through their personal narratives, it became evident that teachers faced significant hurdles related to learning delays, academic unpreparedness, and student behavior. Yet, their journeys also highlighted resilience, creativity, and professional growth as they moved through the phases of transition. The research underscored the importance of providing teachers with ongoing professional development, emotional support, and opportunities for collaboration. Ultimately, it emphasized that empowering educators is essential not only for their well-being but also for the overall effectiveness of teaching in times of disruption and change.

### **4.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I sincerely express my deepest gratitude to my adviser, Ma'am Melissa Jose, MAEd, for her invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and constructive feedback throughout this research journey. Her encouragement and expertise have been instrumental in the successful completion of this study. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to my parents, for their unconditional love, constant support, and sacrifices, which have motivated me to persevere. Their unwavering belief in me has been a source of strength during this challenging process. Above all, I give my utmost thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, my savior, for granting me wisdom, patience, and resilience. His divine guidance and grace have sustained me through every challenge, and I dedicate this accomplishment to Him.

## **5.0 COMPETING INTERESTS**

The author declares that there are no competing interests in this study.

## **6.0 AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

The author was responsible for conceptualizing the study, conducting data collection and analysis, and preparing the manuscript.

## **7.0 CONSENT**

All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study. They were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences.

## **8.0 ETHICAL APPROVAL**

This study was reviewed and approved by the Holy Cross of Davao College Research Ethics Committee. Ethical considerations included ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation, and adherence to ethical research guidelines.

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