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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COPING MECHANISMS OF PUBLIC TEACHERS DURING THE PANDEMIC: AN EVALUATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The threat of the widespread pandemic COVID19 has hit every nation around the globe by surprise. There has been a sudden closure of economic activity and a need to alter processes to what we now call the “New Normal”. Along with the changes in economic system and lifestyle during the pandemic time, are changes in the education system of the Department of Education in the implementation of different modalities of learning and new teaching approaches. It has been a notion for our Education Department to look for alternatives in order for education to continue despite the threats of the Pandemic. The pandemic caused many reasons for concern from the people in the education sector most especially the public teachers who are now given the burden to make education happen no matter what the consequences and challenges there may be. This study evaluated the different coping mechanisms of public teachers to handle stress that was brought by the pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

In a sudden outbreak of the novel corona virus, the world Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared the outbreak as a pandemic and left the whole world shaken unprepared. Threats in health and safety continue to worry the population and has affected the economic security, food and supply sufficiency and even the education stability of the country. Considering that this is a global issue, Filipino families are greatly affected by the pandemic (SONA 2020). Despite the many challenges that we face, our education department could not afford to deprive the students of the opportunity for learning. Even though that the Department of Education moved the opening of classes on October 5 of this year (DEPED 2020), the department is still in a continuous effort to look for measures and alternative mode to continue the education journey of the students without compromising safety. The Department launched online platforms like DEPED Commons, Knowledge Channels, and employed distance learning methods with the use of modules to serve teachers and students nationwide. Although distance learning and online platforms may not entirely new as a system of learning, but the implementation of this to replace the usual face-to-face method is quite a challenge for many of the teachers and students. Public school teachers as public servants are expected to deliver the utmost quality in education despite the challenges they face.

They play the huge role in providing education on a frontline service. Therefore, it is important that we study the welfare of public teachers, its multifaceted profession, and consider their psychosocial well-being, most especially in this time of pandemic. The Philippine government have developed implementing guidelines to address the welfare of public teachers most especially in the aspect of financial intervention. The Republic Act 11469 also known as “Bayanihan to Heal as One” Act, provisioned guidelines to provide financial aid during community quarantine. DepEd Memorandum No.98 s.2020 provide guidelines on the conduct of mental health and psychosocial support services for the opening of classes for the current school year. These are only a few among other guidelines which focus on aiding public teachers to cope with the struggles and challenges during this crisis. Although there may have set provisions for public teachers’ safety, it is important to note that in this current pandemic, a lot remains undiscovered and the status of coping mechanisms of our public teachers is still yet to be analyzed in order to further improve and develop awareness, proposed programs and psychosocial aid to be given to our public teachers. This research will take a deeper dive in the coping mechanism of public teachers now that they are most challenged by this time of crisis.

Objectives

This evaluative study aims to stand as an assessment item on the coping mechanism of public teachers in the Philippines as part of teachers’ protection program during the pandemic.

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Specifically, this evaluative study seeks to understand the following points:

1. Determine common stressors of public teachers in the Philippines during the time of pandemic;
2. Identify common coping mechanisms of public teachers in the Philippines during the pandemic.
3. Determine action-based types of coping mechanism and emotion-based types of coping mechanism
4. Propose intervention plan to provide effective coping mechanism programs for public teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive research approach which utilizes data from reliable contents from the internet and latest published articles and materials. It evaluates and analyzes data from current implementing guidelines in order to determine the intervention plan to improve and promote coping mechanism programs for public teachers during the time of pandemic. This research paper also utilized current related literature and studies from reliable sources of reference in seeking knowledge and information that answers all the objective of this paper. In addition, this research identifies key improvement programs that will be of help to public teachers during this time of global crisis and further develop an immediate action plan to aid public teachers' coping mechanism in order to have effective and efficient opening of the school year under the new normal education system.

Presentation of Data and Analysis

A. Stressors of Public Teachers during the time of Pandemic

Public teachers during the pandemic are said to be burned out and grieving at the same time as they try to make ends meet by doing developing alternative modes to deliver learning despite their own worries for their health and safety. Gewertz (2020) discussed the skyrocketing stress of educators during the time of pandemic. She mentioned that stress is not new to the teaching job but it seemed to be a daily serving nowadays driven by the pandemic. The clamor of developing strategies to cater for distance learning make teachers adopt the latest technology that was not quite required on traditional face-to-face learning, not to mention the constant teleconferencing, webinars and calls to attend to, from school administrators, parents and students just make the rumble jumble a bit of a daily scenario for public teachers. According to (Talidong & Toquero, 2020) school closures, lock down and home quarantine, physical distancing as implemented by the "new normal" system can be reasons of anxiety among teachers. (Ramos 2020) cited some of the stressors of public teachers nowadays are as follows:

Unpreparedness to what has to come: The transition to online or blended learning is quite challenging for most teachers as they try to develop interactivity and engage their students in the lessons delivered. Beteille (2020) learner engagement must be established in order to properly implement online tasks. Blended learning through remote instruction affect the well-being of professors and their students as well. Teachers have to make multiple efforts to engage their students in class as well as to guide them in technical difficulties during activities and remotely manage their progress is already a bit of a stressor.

The widespread school closure due to the worldwide pandemic makes this demand of learning new technology and innovations inevitable.

A must to multi-task: Teachers doing online work-from-home setup have to handle properly multiple tasks because aside from being a classroom teacher they also play other roles at home (wife, mother, husband) and time given during face-to-face or online engagement is limited and public teachers are expected to make their students engage and understand the lessons they have to deliver. Thus, public teachers face a huge amount of stress handling multiple tasks at the same time engaging their students to their lessons. Teaching online is quite a challenge as compare to the traditional face-to-face learning, from an interview (CNU PIO, 2020). It is a challenge for both public teachers as well as students so they are given substantial time to adjust.

Health and Safety Concerns: Quality of Work Life survey conducted by Gallup Poll (2017), revealed that 61 percent of educators feels stressed at work the same as that of medical frontline service such as physicians and nurses because they take frontline service to deliver services to the community. The pandemic increased the worries of public teachers for their health and safety as the opening of classes is set on the 5th of October. Public teachers even the learners and their parents admit that they are not ready to bargain their health and lives amid the COVID-19c crisis (Malipot, 2020). The increase health and safety concerns still continue to rise and the confidence level of the public teachers is still very low as the answer to the pandemic crisis is yet to be determined.

B. Coping Mechanisms of Public Teachers

There are 2 classification of coping mechanisms as identified by Folkman in 1984 as cited by Mcleod (2015) these are the (1) Action-based Coping Mechanism which involves directly dealing with the cause of stress and devise a solution to overcome it; (2) Second is the Emotion-based Coping Mechanism which involves relieving stress through indirect ways like denial, distractions, humor or relaxation. Public teachers dealing with stress from different sources should have positive approach in coping with it. The following are the common coping mechanisms among a few:

Know the Source of Stress: According to a study by Kitenga (2009), that examined the effectiveness of various coping mechanism used by public teachers in primary schools. In the study, teachers agree that getting to know pupils as individuals calculated as 57% is the most effective coping mechanisms because it addressed the source of stress directly. Overcoming the stress by understanding and taking action, makes the stressor easier to handle. Doing what really matters is important in dealing with stress (WHO 2020). These are practical ways to deal with the worries that control and hinder us on doing the most essential task. A bigger part of coping stress is the awareness that we are stressed and the reasons behind it in order to be able to focus and pay attention on the bigger challenge ahead. In addition, it is vital that we know how to combat the stressor by getting the right information about it. Reading not validated sources of information may just lead to a heightened anxiety over the problems of COVID-19. It is important to be aware of the preventive measures in order to combat the crisis (Roy et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020)

Reinvent and Skills Development: During the time of pandemic, most of the key cities and towns in the Philippines had to be in an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) for more than a couple of months. According to a survey, Talidong & Toquero (2020) most Filipino Teachers spend more time in social media and develop new hobbies and reinvent their skills, while others communicate with friends and loved-ones and seek spiritual guidance. During the community quarantine the Department of Education launched a self-paced online learning program Teach-On for public teachers for free (DEPED 2020). The platform aims to develop and keep the passion to teacher alive. According to (WHO 2019) one can draw the skills they have used in the past and use it again in this time of outbreak. Developing new skills can greatly help increase the level of self-confidence to oneself.

Keep a Healthy Lifestyle: It cannot be denied that eating healthy and living a healthy lifestyle are common factors of relieving stress. (RedCross 2020) In order to cope with stress, aside from getting accurate information from trusted sources, avoiding outlets that promote fear or spread of rumors is beneficial to mental health. Avoiding media accounts that do not promote good vibes is one way to protect and take care of oneself. In addition, physical health is also important so eating healthy diet, getting enough rest and exercise is essential in dealing with stress. DEPED recognized the value of mental health and psychosocial support services (DM No.82) as it aims to provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services for public teachers, DEPED personnel, learners and parents in response to the current pandemic COVID-19 crisis as part of the back to school measures. The department intends to reach out to public teachers as well as the parents and students using remote access to facilitate support in the psychosocial improvement as part of the coping mechanisms provided.

Keep the Connection: Staying connected with loved ones, friends and colleagues especially during physical isolation. Talking to somebody helps with the psychosocial well-being and coping mechanism (Smith & Robinson, 2020). For most public teachers in the Philippines, religion plays an important role in coping with stress. Praying as an integral part of connecting to a higher entity that keep levels of worries and anxiety low as trust and faith started to build up.

Conclusion

During this time of the crisis, the resiliency of the public teachers in the Philippines is challenged to its core. This evaluative study attempted to analyze the coping mechanisms of public teachers during this time of pandemic. It can be concluded that:

1. Most common stressors of public teachers are the new wave of technology, having to multi-task, develop new strategies and Health and safety concerns.
2. Public Teachers most ways to cope with stress is to know the stressors, Innovate and reinvent for skills development, keeping healthy lifestyle and keeping a connection.
3. Public teachers look for positive ways in dealing with the challenges brought by this pandemic as shown in the way public teachers manage stress by converting adversities to opportunities.

4. The pandemic affects the emotional as well as the physical well-being of the public teachers.
5. Public teachers' coping mechanisms are both Action-based and the Emotion-based coping mechanisms.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A course of psychosocial assessment must be developed in order to determine stressors of every public teacher.
2. A course of Psychosocial assessment must be developed to determine action-based and Emotion-based coping mechanism tendencies.
3. Integrate psychosocial values for each activities and programs aspart of the lessons.
4. Provide opportunity for psychosocial activities that would develop mental health awareness in order to develop action-based coping mechanisms.
5. Provide programs that would develop healthy lifestyle for public teachers.

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