

Thriving Amidst the Pandemic: Examining the Lived Experiences of Work from Home Filipino Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual experiences of work-from-home (WFH) Filipino teachers. It also provides descriptions of the positive and negative aspects of working from home and how they adapt to the new culture. This study describes exceptional or new thoughts and feelings of WFH Filipino teachers. Using a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the researchers explored teachers' lived experiences in teaching in a work-from-home environment. This study included ten (10) teachers from both public and private schools in Metro Manila. Analyses of the data revealed key themes from the teachers' perspectives of the work-from-home environment. Respondents accepted the new culture of working from home, opened their minds to all possibilities, and were eager to learn new things to adapt to changes. Online teaching-learning is not possible without the respondents' participation in training and seminars. Technical issues, communication concerns, student learning conditions, family concerns, household issues, and health conditions are some of the challenges in teaching and working at home based on the research. Teacher participants expressed that WFH experiences were challenging and exhausting but they found it fulfilling as well. They cultivated the teachers' traits of being flexible, innovative, dynamic, and sociable despite the many challenges that they have encountered in the intricate setup to enhance success and effectiveness in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords:

Pandemic; Work from Home (WFH); Online Learning; Lived Experiences.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki pengalaman mental, fisik, emosional, sosial, dan spiritual dari guru-guru Filipina yang bekerja dari rumah (WFH). Ini juga memberikan deskripsi tentang aspek positif dan negatif dari bekerja dari rumah dan bagaimana mereka beradaptasi dengan budaya baru. Penelitian ini menggambarkan pemikiran dan perasaan yang luar biasa atau baru dari para guru WFH Filipina. Menggunakan metodologi fenomenologis kualitatif, para peneliti mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup guru dalam mengajar di lingkungan kerja dari rumah. Penelitian ini melibatkan sepuluh (10) guru dari sekolah negeri dan swasta di Metro Manila. Analisis data mengungkapkan tema kunci dari perspektif guru tentang lingkungan kerja dari rumah. Responden menerima budaya baru bekerja dari rumah, membuka pikiran terhadap segala kemungkinan, dan berkeinginan untuk mempelajari hal-hal baru agar dapat beradaptasi dengan perubahan. Belajar-mengajar secara online tidak mungkin dilakukan tanpa partisipasi responden dalam pelatihan dan seminar. Masalah teknis, masalah komunikasi, kondisi belajar siswa, masalah keluarga, masalah rumah tangga, dan kondisi kesehatan adalah beberapa tantangan dalam mengajar dan bekerja di rumah berdasarkan penelitian. Peserta guru mengungkapkan bahwa pengalaman WFH itu menantang dan melelahkan tetapi mereka juga merasa puas. Mereka memupuk sifat-sifat guru yang fleksibel, inovatif, dinamis, dan mudah bergaul meskipun banyak tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam pengaturan yang rumit untuk meningkatkan keberhasilan dan efektivitas dalam proses belajar-mengajar.

Kata Kunci:

Pandemi; Work from Home (WFH); Pembelajaran Online; Pengalaman Langsung.

1. Introduction

Due to the extenuating circumstances brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, schools in the Philippines face tremendous challenges. Over 900 private schools have closed (Pamintuan, 2020) and for those that still operate, home-based teaching and learning have been implemented. Live experiences of work-from-home Filipino teachers created substantial challenges (Kraft and Simon, 2020). Gone are the days when teachers and school stakeholders meet face to face for teaching, meeting, discussion, and conference. Instead, they meet online using platforms like

Google Meet or Zoom applications (Looper, Blanchet, and Cohen 2021), and teachers are urged to teach and work from home (Malipot, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to look into the working conditions of home teachers using a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Teachers play a major role in producing significantly better schools and better-educated students; thus, teachers must retain their inspiration and motivation to teach (Johnson, 2017). Despite fulfilling experiences serving a troubled and confused community (Mahmudah, et al., 2020) due to the pandemic, teachers are also looking forward to more effective learning outcomes in work from home environments (Flynn, 2018). Teaching from home distorts the boundaries between work and personal life (Crosbie and Moore, 2004; Sherman 2018), which is exhausting and frustrating for many educators. There are disruptions where they are working, which may involve caregiving and taking care of the kids (Mercado, 2020). Most of them, especially the married female faculty members, struggle through balancing their childcare and teaching responsibilities. Working from home is proving demanding and tough for many teachers. Teachers exhaust a lot of time getting their classes online preparing for the PPT presentation, checking students' assignments submitted through emails and Google Drive, and conducting assessments with the aid of other online tools. They have to explore a lot in online platforms and tools that will keep their students' attention and make the dynamic of the virtual discussion (Ariawan, 2020). This paper has its own limitations to compare the perspectives of the male and female teachers. Moreover, further research in the area of civil or marital status, age differences, places where the teachers work--province or city, institutions whether the teachers work in private or public school and the teachers' length of service- novice or master teacher could adhere to the differences and similarities of educators' work from home experiences.

The study intends to describe their experiences as work-from-home teachers from a mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual standpoint. Because the advent of remote work and an increasingly virtual world appears to be having a long-term impact, teachers must be fully empowered to face the challenges of remote teaching. The positive and negative effects of working from home for teachers will be emphasized in this study because the home environment has a large impact on the teachers' professional and personal lives (Day, 2005). This research investigates also how teachers adapt to the new culture of work from home environment. The suitability of teaching space at home poses a challenge for the teachers who truly cannot work at home because their abodes are too small, or the distractions are too enormous. Teachers are working in the limited space at home while fulfilling household duties. In the realm of education, teachers have to fully maximize their cognizance of the use of technology (Nagel, 2019) due to the shift from face-to-face to online or remote learning. They must engage their students in active digital learning, thus, the acquisition of knowledge for training and development on Education 4.0—from the online learning tools, evolving platforms to teaching strategies is imperative (Abdul et al., 2020). While these are necessary, most teachers encounter challenges with connectivity issues, home internet speeds, and devices. Included in this study is to describe the exceptional and new thoughts and feelings that the teachers experienced as work from the home teacher. With

anxieties about the public health crisis getting high (Panchal, et al. 2021), teachers are worried about their own families, parents, and siblings' health, and job security.

These are the many scenarios encountered by the teachers as the modality has transitioned from face-to-face to online teaching and due to the coronavirus pandemic. Teachers are required to work from home aspiring to minimize or to put the spread of the virus to a halt. As much is expected of teachers as they transfer knowledge to the nation's future leaders (Vasquez, 2019), the state, community, and school stakeholders must ensure that teachers' well-being is given importance.

2. Methods

A qualitative phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994) was used in this study. Phenomenological research studies in educational settings generally embody lived experience, perception, and feelings of participants about a phenomenon (Yüksel and Yildirim, 2015), which in this case, is the experience of work-from-home Filipino teachers in the time of the pandemic. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of work-from-home teachers with the use of triangulation strategies (Salkind, 2010). This chapter contains the rationale for utilizing a qualitative research design, along with the sample, recruiting strategies, and procedures for data collection and management. Also included are the approaches to data analysis and interpretations used, including techniques to establish the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected (Morse 2002).

For phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) recommends 5 – 25, and Morse (1994) suggests at least six. So, in this study, the researcher considered 10 participants: 5 public and 5 private teachers employed in Metro Manila. The teachers selected to participate in the phenomenological study have significant and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being investigated (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Purposeful sampling (Bloor and Wood, 2006) was used in this study. The researchers selected the participants purposefully since they could understand the phenomenon; thus, the researchers could decide whether participants share significant and meaningful experiences concerning the phenomenon under the investigation. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the teachers using the Google Meet and Zoom Apps. Probes and follow-up questions were added as needed throughout the interview process to encourage elaboration and clarify responses. All interviews were recorded online for accuracy. The interview protocol included eight questions about the following topics: WFH Filipino teachers' mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual experiences; positive and negative aspects of working from home; adaptation to a new culture; challenges and overcoming challenges; technology adoption; and new thoughts and feelings of WFH teachers. In response to emerging themes, specific questions were added as the interview process progressed. The authors conducted all interviews and immediately transcribed them. In this study, Moustakas' structured method of inductive data analysis was used. Following a second reading of each individual transcript to immerse the researcher in the data, all transcripts were read again and memos were recorded to

further immerse the researcher and highlight key concepts. Following the initial immersion, the following steps were taken: horizontalization; the reduction and elimination of statements that were not part of the experience's horizon; thematic clustering; comparison of multiple data sources to validate invariant constituents; final theme identification; constructing of individual textural and structural descriptions; and construction of composite structural descriptions.

Table 1. Respondents' Personal Profile

Respondents	School	Age	Gender		Marital	Status
			Male	Female	Single	Married
R1	Private	28		1	1	
R2	Private	47		1		1
R3	Private	22		1	1	
R4	Private	33		1		1
R5	Private	26		1		1
Average Age		31.2				
R6	Public	31		1		1
R7	Public	39		1		1
R8	Public	51		1		1
R9	Public	35		1	1	
R10	Public	38	1			1
Average Age		38.0				
Total			1	9	3	7

In this study, respondents were 10 teachers from public and private schools in Metro Manila. For confidentiality purposes, respondents were given the initials or codes R1, R2, R3.... R10. Table 1 shows the respondents' personal profiles. There are five (5) teachers from private schools which are all female and two are single. The respondents in public school are composed of five teachers as well with only one single in status, one male, and only one is not yet married. The ages range from 22 – 51 years old which is composed of 3 in the '20s, 5 in the '30s, and only 1 in the '40s and '50s. The average age of the public school teachers was 38.8 years old while the private school teachers' ages averaged 31.2.

Of the ten participants interviewed, five of them taught in private school--two in Grade school, one in high school, and two in Senior high school. Moreover, five of the participants taught in public school--three in Grade school, one in high school, and two in Senior High school. Two of the participants had less than five-year teaching experience, three had taught from six to ten years

and five of the teachers had taught from eleven to fifteen years. All of them were full-time faculty members.

Table 2. Respondents’ Professional Profile

School	Grade Level Assignment			Years of Teaching Experience			
	Grade School	High School	Senior High School	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20
Public	3	1	1		1	3	1
Private	2	1	2	2	2	2	
TOTAL	5	1	3	2	3	5	1

3. Results and Discussion

Examining the lived experiences of work from home teachers was not easy for researchers because it takes courage to ask the teachers how they feel about the current pandemic. The research questions were answered based on the respondents’ experiences in the new normal. Responses were classified according to themes and sub-themes that came from public and private school teachers.

3.1 Experiences of Work from Home teachers

The work experiences of work from home teachers have been described in terms of different aspects of life.

Table 3. Experiences of WFH Teachers in Different Aspects of Life

Mental	Physical	Emotional	Social	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● challenged ● stressed ● depressed ● drained and exhausted 	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● have time to rest and relax <p>Disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● becoming lazy and tired, ● eye strain ● muscle cramps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● anxious ● depressed ● unstable ● challenged ● fulfilling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● deprived of face-to-face normal conversation ● caged and bored 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● became more closer to God ● spiritually filled ● became very reflective ● strengthened their faith

3.1.1 Mental

Teachers' mental health is the most affected angle in teachers' lives. The new setup, new ways of teaching-learning strategies, and the presence of technology made the teachers working from home feel challenged, stressed, and depressed. The respondents claimed that they are mentally drained and exhausted. It is also added that working from home is advantageous. Steidtmann, McBride, and Mishkind (2020) mention that identified benefits of WFH included lack of commute, time with loved ones, opportunities for self-care, and increased flexibility. Most participants (80%) reported no change in mental health since the COVID-19 pandemic (Gijzen et al, 2020). People working from home create positive and negative mental experiences depending on the nature of their work.

Respondent 2: *"It has been challenging because everything is in a new platform, and you have to adapt and relearn ways on how to navigate and bring yourself to a new level up of working dynamics and system".*

Respondent 6: *"I found working from home advantageous since the computer is always at hand, I can also check anything I need to learn from online sources and easily organize my thoughts. "*

3.1.2 Physical

According to the survey participants, it is both physically advantageous and disadvantageous. Advantageous because they have time to rest and relax and are at a disadvantage due to becoming lazy and tired, caused by eye strain and muscle cramps. According to Ekpanyaskul and Padungtod (2021), body weight changes, ergonomic problems, indoor environmental problems, and psychosocial problems were all significantly related to the intensity of working from home, either positively or negatively. The women performing work from home during the lockdown are going through the moderately increased physical and mental load. Their health is also affected by the development of musculoskeletal problems (Sharma & Vaish, 2020). WFH employees are affected physically and are encouraged to have some physical activities that will help them stay healthy and fit.

Respondent 10: *"I love it since my body is more relaxed compared to working physically in the workplace. I can save much energy in going to school every day."*

3.1.3 Emotional

Not only teachers are emotionally affected by a sudden change of teaching-learning environment but also the students. Missing the students is one of the primary reasons for teachers feeling anxious, depressed, unstable, and challenged. On the other hand, a respondent claimed that working from home is fulfilling. According to Palumbo (2020), employees who worked remotely from home experienced increased work-to-life and life-to-work conflicts. Telecommuting from

home resulted in increased work-related fatigue, worsening the perceived work-life balance. There is also a calming effect of New Age music on self-reported symptoms of physical and emotional stress. These reported effects include the promotion of mental focus and an immediate physical and emotional release from stress (Castillo, 2018). Employees in other organizations are also experiencing emotional problems as a result of working from home in this case, but they have devised some strategies to deal with the emotional stress (Hagger, Keech, and Hamilton, 2020).

Respondent 9: *"I am missing my students because I didn't get to see them personally. I always wonder if they were able to understand the lessons, especially those who don't have access to learning online."*

Respondent 2: *"Yet, it's fulfilling to realize that you are able to survive, adapt and be a part of such a time as this to cascade, teach, encourage, influence and fill young minds through this noble profession of teaching."*

3.1.4 Social

The social life of the teachers and students is greatly affected by the online learning environment. The lives of the students are centered around the school environment for the whole day in the normal school setup until a sudden change due to pandemic, likewise, teachers' social life is also affected since the time after school is the only chance to enjoy and to relax with friends. According to the respondents, having been deprived of face-to-face normal conversation, it was a good change and chance since they were able to talk to almost 80% of their students in a day for more follow-ups using chat. The connection between students and teachers is still present. On the other hand, the respondents said that they are caged and bored. For a sociable individual, this is a challenge because it hinders the chance to get to know their colleagues well. Results about social life were mixed, some translators expressed positive social effects of working from home, but others emphasized isolation due to working from home (Kırcı, 2019).

Respondent 7. *"The great shift happened. I was able to call around 80% of the people on my phone list and chatted with so many people on the net. The physical presence of people was compensated by me chatting and rekindling relationships through technology. I think it was a good change and chance."*

Respondent 10. *"Since I am a sociable person, I always long to be in a group. Unfortunately, WFH is quite a different set-up. I love sharing and talking with my colleagues after working hours. Honestly, most of the time I get bored and think of going out. It affects my daily routine."*

3.1.5 Spiritual

Our faith in our Lord was tested in this time of the pandemic. The spiritual life of every individual became stronger in the hope that everything will be back to normal. Spirituality, according to Scott and Greenhaus (2013), is associated with personal characteristics such as hope,

optimism, and sanctification, as well as relational characteristics such as forgiveness, gratitude, and interconnectedness. From the point of view of the teachers who participated in this study, they became closer to God, spiritually filled, became very reflective, and even strengthened their faith. Working from home is a blessing rather than being jobless. Management also needs to address the role of emotion, and spirituality in particular, in the change process (Dehler and Welch, 1994).

Respondent 6. *"Talking spiritually, I thank God for the blessings of WFH rather than being jobless. Working and earning for a living in this time of pandemic is better. These manifests hope that things will go normally again, despite the pandemic."*

3.2 The Positive and Negative Aspects of Working from Home

Common responses came out from the public and private school teachers. The respondents assured that they have enough time for their family, especially those with children. Time is used productively. Working in their own workplace at home gives the respondent comfort and peace of mind. Being free from viruses is also a concern of the respondents since going out is only limited to buying food and other stuff. According to Kaushik and Guleria (2020), the WFH mode is assisting some industries and functions in keeping their operations running in a limited way. According to Bolisani et al (2020), working from home were able to keep good relationships with colleagues and were able to carry out their normal job. Teachers always find positivity in their work, whether they work in a face-to-face setting or from home.

It was discovered that individuals who spend a lot of time on their devices have more stress, fatigue, headaches, and depression. Other concerns raised included socialization, internet access, and workload issues. There are also negative aspects and risks attached to remote working such as work overload and pressures to perform timeously. Matli (2020) states that working from home can pose severe threats to workers' routines and lifestyles, and the lack of interaction can impinge on their health and general well-being. People working on WFH, are compelled to live in social isolation and emotional distancing (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020). There have been nearly identical experiences that have resulted in negative aspects of WFH status, such as feelings of isolation or a lack of social life, workload, and health issues. According to Chaturvedi et al. (2021), public authorities should take all necessary steps to improve the learning experience by mitigating the negative effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

3.3 Adapting to a New Culture of Work from Home Environment

The digital world is a place where we live now in which we cannot live without all these gadgets, advancements in technology, and technological training. Corpuz (2021) argues that adapting to the 'new normal' can greatly affect the future. In order to adapt to changes, the respondents accepted the new culture of working from home, set their minds to all possibilities, and were open to learning new things. Online teaching-learning (Coman, et al, 2020) is not possible

without training and seminars attended by the respondents.

3.4 Challenges in Teaching and Working from Home

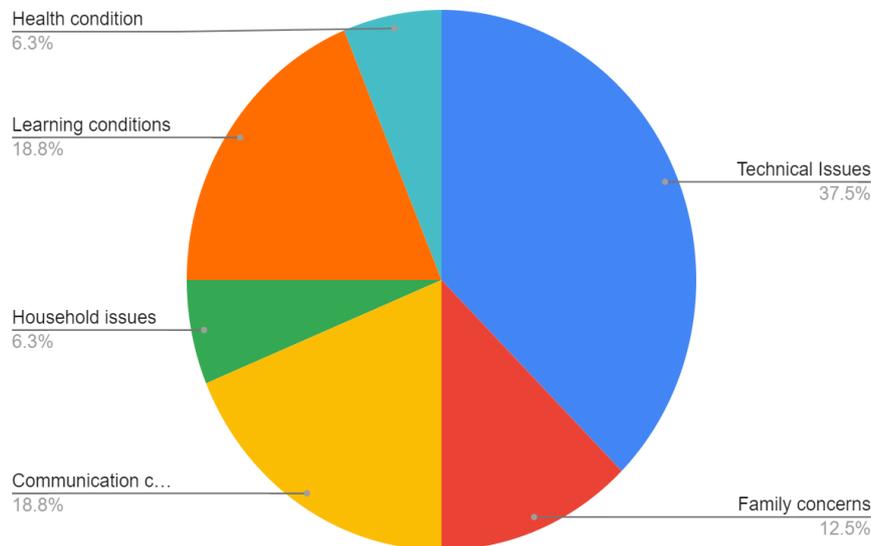


Figure 1. Challenges in Teaching and Working from Home

Challenges in teaching and working at a home based on the study are classified into different categories such as technical issues, communication concerns, students' learning conditions, family concerns, household issues, and health conditions. 37.5% of the respondents are having technical difficulties such as unstable connection that causes lagging during an online class. Challenges in communicating with colleagues and students are also emphasized by the respondents with 18.8%. It was mentioned by Respondent 6 that “There are unclear and simultaneous instructions at work also that cannot be easily clarified because communication is only done online.” Respondents also mentioned that students who cannot be reached by phone pose difficulties. Students with a learning condition of 18.8%, which includes no gadgets and no internet connection, are asked to complete only the modules. 12.5% of family concerns came from teacher-parents who have children at home who sometimes cling to them and distract them. The household distraction has the lowest percentage of 6.3%, and the health issue has the same percentage. Respondent 4 added that “This ‘new normal’ in teaching is already a challenge.”

3.5 Addressing the challenges

One of the most important qualities of a teacher is flexibility, but a recent study by Aczel, Kovacs, and Lippe (2021) discovered that the pandemic lockdown reduced work efficiency. In some ways, the study's respondents are adaptable enough to provide solutions to the challenges they

face when working from home. The solutions are also classified according to the difficulties they encountered, such as 5.1. Technical issues. The respondents affirmed that they sought technical help from friends, applied for a stronger and higher DSL net provider, learned the use of different online platforms, and sought appropriate teaching strategies.

a. Communication concerns.

The respondents tried to resolve some communication issues by soliciting advice from superiors concerning complicated instructions, having constant communication with their advisers, and updating my students and their guardians on how they cope up with the lessons.

b. Students' learning condition.

One way of understanding students nowadays is by creating deeper connections to the learners as a respondent answered, and keeping on track with the students.

c. Family concerns.

Teacher-parent made his child busy with other school-related activities and gave him some stuff to do.

d. Household issues.

Since the teacher respondent encountered some household issues, she diverted her time to do other things at home after the lessons and tasks. She tended to a little garden, cooking, or doing creative tasks like crocheting, drawing, journaling.

e. Health condition.

A respondent bought a new pair of eyeglasses twice.

They also think about time management and patience. One respondent stated that he held webinars for fellow teachers and coworkers to become acquainted with navigating and conducting online teaching.

Respondent 2: "We were also encouraged to attend other webinars outside PGPCS just to gain additional insights that will help us in our teaching skills that we can use in this new online platform of education."

Respondent 7: "I just think that there are things that are out of my control and accept it before I go to sleep."

3.6 Adoption of Technology in Classroom Management Approach and Teaching Philosophy

Teachers and students need training in integrating technology with teaching and learning processes (Farooq & Soormro, 2018). The respondents revealed a lot of learning in teaching from home from the adoption of technology, such as new teaching and technological skills, higher standards in teaching and technology integration, teaching strategies, and becoming more flexible and adaptive.

Changes in classroom management approach according to the respondent is still the same and it is just the use of the platform, and maximizing it into something that the students will enjoy while learning. Institutions write about how they 'use' technology for teaching and learning, and technology is 'used' as both an end in itself and a means to specific ends such as assessment and feedback and flexible learning (Matthews, 2021). Respondent 5 mentioned that "Yes, because you have to be more considerate, to be more vigilant/aware and be able to attend your learner's adoption as well." While Respondent 7 said, "I think I can maximize using the knowledge I gained from the many seminars I attended during the lockdown." Respondent 8 believed that "It definitely has a huge difference since we cannot closely monitor the students and if they really can grasp the knowledge".

Not so much explanation came out from the respondents regarding the influence of technology adoption in teaching philosophy. 70% of the respondents believed that their philosophy has changed, 10% of the respondents said it did not change but only the use of technology as the platform changed. The other 20% of the respondents remained speechless.

3.7 *Exceptional/New Thoughts and Feelings of Work from Home Teachers*

Lots of new thoughts and feelings revealed by the work from home teachers such as striving to adapt to changes should always be ready for change, prepared in any possibilities, and teachers should be knowledgeable of different applications to make the online teaching more effective. Flexibility and dynamism will always be an advantage to combat change.

Respondent 7: *"I am now confident at using technology in teaching and becomes more open to learning new technological skills. I also learn to be more disciplined in terms of time and quality now that work is done at home. I envisioned a future with the possibility that more schools are capable to offer homeschooling programs even after the pandemic."*

Respondent 8: *"I think I have to accept the fact this setup will last for a year or two so I think that we should all be observant and responsive to our needs as well as our students' and parents."*

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the interviews with work-from-home Filipino teachers during the pandemic, it is possible to conclude that working from home during the pandemic affected the teachers' mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual lives. The current phenomenon identified teachers' negative experiences such as being challenged, depressed, stressed, and drained, as well as physically creating health problems such as eye strain and muscle cramps. Teachers experienced emotional and social stress as a result of missing their students and the normal activities of the school day. The spiritual aspect of the teachers' lives had a positive impact on them by bringing

them closer to God and filling them spiritually. The primary challenge that work-from-home teachers face is a poor internet connection. Regardless of whether these teachers work in Metro Manila, how much more do those who work in remote locations and provinces face? If the government is unable to bring our network up to par with that of other countries, the Department of Education must investigate alternative methods of imparting learning that make less use of the Internet. Despite the challenges of working from home, participants in this study were found to be flexible, innovative, dynamic, and socially responsible. This exemplifies the positive qualities of Filipino teachers that must be instilled, cultivated, and appreciated. As we reflected on the findings, we realized that the importance of this study may be focused on the professional development of teachers to achieve excellence in the implementation and use of virtual classrooms in collaboration with the Department of Education and other government agencies. This research paper suggests that work-from-home conditions be evaluated and monitored for specific groups of people in educational institutions, such as school heads and administrators, non-teaching personnel, Human resources, and admission employees, students, or any other school stakeholders. Leaders and managers who read this study should pay attention to the specific concerns expressed by each participant from their point of view. Work-from-home can be successful if both the educators and the school act responsibly. School administrators can quickly and precisely support, empower, and capacitate teachers, and through this, teachers are undoubtedly happier, more motivated, and dedicated to providing excellent instruction, moreover, producing excellent student outcomes as well.

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