Innovations

Navigating Barriers and Building Capacity: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers' Action Research Experiences in Samar Island During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of basic education teachers conducting action research during the COVID-19 pandemic in Samar Island, Philippines. In-depth interviews were conducted with 32 teachers across three divisions who attempted to implement action research projects during the pandemic. Using Colaizzi's method for data analysis, three major themes emerged: (1) Confronting Pandemic-Related Research Barriers, (2) Adaptive Research Strategies, and (3) Transformative Professional Growth. The study revealed that teachers faced significant challenges in data collection, participant engagement, and maintaining research momentum amid pandemic restrictions. However, many demonstrated remarkable resilience by developing alternative methodologies, leveraging digital platforms, and forming collaborative research communities. The findings suggest that despite considerable obstacles, the pandemic context prompted innovative approaches to educational action research and fostered deeper appreciation for research flexibility and resilience. The study recommends enhanced institution-level support systems, expanded virtual research training opportunities, flexible research frameworks accommodating pandemic constraints, and policies promoting collaborative research models. These insights provide a foundation for strengthening action research implementation in challenging contexts while highlighting the transformative potential of research persistence during crisis situations.*

Keywords: 1.Action Research, 2.COVID-19, 3.Teacher-Researchers, 4.Research Adaptation, 5.Phenomenology, 6.Educational Research

I.   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated unprecedented disruptions across educational systems worldwide, radically transforming teaching and learning modalities while simultaneously complicating established research practices (Fauci et al., 2020; Sohrabi et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). For teacher-researchers in the Philippines, particularly those in geographically isolated regions like Samar Island,

these disruptions compounded existing challenges in conducting action research—an essential component of educational improvement and professional development (Akbulaev et al., 2020; ILO, 2020).

Action research, characterized by its cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection, has been increasingly emphasized within the Philippine basic education sector as a mechanism for evidence-based decision-making and pedagogical innovation (Ryan et al., 2020). The Department of Education's Basic Education Research Agenda, formalized through DepEd Order No. 016, s. 2017, underscores the importance of teacher-led research in addressing contextual educational challenges and informing policy development. Despite this institutional emphasis, the pandemic introduced novel barriers to research implementation, necessitating significant adaptations in research methodology, participant engagement, and data collection processes.

The transition to remote and blended learning modalities during the pandemic was particularly challenging for teachers in Samar Island, who already confronted limitations in technological infrastructure, geographic isolation, and institutional research support (Panela, 2022). While studies have examined the broader impacts of COVID-19 on educational delivery and teacher well-being, there remains a significant gap in understanding how teachers navigated the specific challenges of conducting action research during this unprecedented period.

This phenomenological inquiry sought to explore the lived experiences of basic education teachers in Samar Island who attempted to implement action research projects amid pandemic constraints. By illuminating their challenges, adaptive strategies, and transformative insights, the study aimed to contribute meaningful understandings of research resilience and innovation in crisis contexts. These understandings can inform more responsive institutional support systems and flexible research frameworks for similar challenging circumstances in the future.

The study was guided by three theoretical frameworks: Bosch's Blended with Pedagogical Purpose Model, which offers insights into integrating technological and traditional approaches in educational contexts; Dennerlein's Integrative Total Worker Model, which considers the holistic well-being of professionals amid workplace challenges; and Snyder's Hope Theory, which examines goal-directed thinking and pathways amid obstacles. Together, these frameworks provided a comprehensive lens for analyzing how teachers conceptualized, adapted, and persisted in their research endeavors during an extraordinary global crisis

II.   Objectives

This study generally aimed to explore and understand the lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and transformative insights of basic education teachers in Samar Island who attempted to conduct action research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. To explore the lived experiences of basic education teachers in Samar Island who conducted action research during the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. To understand the challenges and barriers they encountered in implementing their research projects amid pandemic restrictions;
3. To identify the adaptive strategies and innovative approaches they developed to navigate research constraints;
4. To examine how their research experiences during the pandemic influenced their professional identity and research perspectives; and
5. To derive insights for strengthening institutional support systems and research frameworks for crisis contexts.

III.   Methodology

a. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of teachers conducting action research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate methodology as it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences and meaning-making processes (Groenewald, 2004). This approach aligned with the study's aim to understand not only the challenges teachers faced but also how they interpreted and responded to these challenges while pursuing their research goals.

The philosophical underpinnings of the study were guided by Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, which emphasizes the importance of capturing the essence of lived experiences through bracketing of preconceptions and careful analysis of participants' narratives (Creswell, 1998). This approach was particularly valuable for understanding the nuanced ways in which teachers navigated the unprecedented circumstances of conducting research during a global pandemic.

b. Participants and Sampling

The study participants were selected using purposive sampling from three school divisions in Samar Island: Calbayog City, Samar, and Catbalogan City.

Inclusion criteria specified that participants must be: (1) currently employed as basic education teachers; (2) have attempted to conduct action research during the pandemic period (2020-2023); (3) be residents of Samar Island; and (4) willing to participate in in-depth interviews about their experiences.

A total of 32 teacher-researchers participated in the study, representing various grade levels, subject areas, and research experience levels. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants

Characteristic	Category	Number	Percentage
School Division	Calbayog City	12	37.5%
	Samar	10	31.3%
	Catbalogan City	10	31.3%
School Level	Elementary	18	56.3%
	Secondary	14	43.8%
Gender	Female	22	68.8%
	Male	10	31.3%
Research Experience	Novice (1-2 projects)	19	59.4%
	Experienced (3+ projects)	13	40.6%
Research Status	Completed	14	43.8%
	In Progress	8	25.0%
	Discontinued	10	31.3%

The sample size was determined by data saturation, where additional interviews no longer yielded substantially new insights relevant to the research objectives (Tongco, 2007). Saturation was reached after 28 interviews, but four additional interviews were conducted to ensure comprehensive data collection.

c. Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide developed specifically for this study. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich narratives about participants' research experiences during the pandemic. The interview guide addressed five key areas:

1. Pre-pandemic research experiences and motivations
2. Initial reactions and adjustments to conducting research during the pandemic
3. Specific challenges encountered in the research process
4. Adaptive strategies and support systems utilized
5. Reflections on professional growth and identity transformation

The interview guide underwent content validation through expert review, with five specialists in educational research and qualitative methodology evaluating its clarity, comprehensiveness, and alignment with research objectives. Based on their feedback, minor revisions were made to enhance question specificity and cultural appropriateness.

Pilot interviews were conducted with three teachers who met the inclusion criteria but were not included in the final sample. These pilot interviews allowed for refinement of question wording, sequencing, and interview techniques to maximize data richness.

d. Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Northwestern Samar State University Research Ethics Committee and permission from the respective Schools Division Superintendents of Calbayog City, Samar, and Catbalogan City. School heads were informed about the study through official correspondence, and their assistance was sought in identifying potential participants based on the inclusion criteria.

Initial contact with potential participants was made through email or mobile communication, providing information about the study purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Those expressing interest received a detailed participant information sheet and consent form. Signed consent forms were collected before scheduling interviews.

Given the ongoing pandemic restrictions, participants were offered three interview modes: face-to-face with health protocols, video conferencing, or telephone. Twenty interviews were conducted via video conferencing platforms (Zoom or Google Meet), eight through face-to-face sessions with strict adherence to health protocols, and four via telephone calls. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted in the participant's preferred language (English, Filipino, or Waray).

All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and were conducted between September 2022 and January 2023. Each session began with rapport-

building and a brief review of the study purpose and ethical considerations. The semi-structured interview guide provided direction while allowing flexibility to explore emerging topics. Probing questions were used to encourage elaboration on significant experiences. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were invited to add any information they felt was relevant but not covered by the questions.

Field notes documenting non-verbal cues, emotional responses, and contextual observations were maintained for each interview. Immediately following each session, the researcher recorded personal reflections on the interview process, preliminary insights, and potential themes. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim within 48 hours of each interview, with translations to English where necessary.

e. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method, which provided a rigorous framework for extracting meaning from participants' narratives while maintaining fidelity to their experiences. The following steps were implemented:

1. **Familiarization**: Each transcript was read multiple times to gain a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. Audio recordings were revisited to capture nuances in tone and emphasis that might not be apparent in written transcripts.
2. **Identifying significant statements**: Statements or phrases directly relevant to teachers' experiences of conducting action research during the pandemic were extracted from each transcript. These significant statements were coded with transcript source, page number, and line numbers for reference.
3. **Formulating meanings**: The researcher interpreted each significant statement to derive its underlying meaning, considering both the explicit content and the broader context of the participant's narrative. Care was taken to maintain connection to the original statements while drawing out deeper meanings.
4. **Clustering themes**: Formulated meanings were organized into clusters of themes that represented common patterns across participants' experiences. These initial themes were continuously refined through an iterative process of comparison and contrast.
5. **Developing an exhaustive description**: A comprehensive narrative was developed, integrating all identified themes to create a detailed description of teachers' experiences conducting action research during the pandemic.

6. **Formulating the fundamental structure**: The exhaustive description was condensed into a fundamental structure that captured the essential aspects of the phenomenon while maintaining its complexity and richness.
7. **Member checking**: To enhance credibility, the fundamental structure and thematic representation were shared with ten participants (selected to represent diverse divisions, school levels, and research statuses) for validation. Their feedback confirmed the accuracy of the analysis and provided additional clarifications that were incorporated into the final analysis.

To enhance analytical rigor, data triangulation was employed by incorporating document review (e.g., participants' research proposals, progress reports, and reflective journals when available) and field notes alongside interview data. Additionally, analyst triangulation was achieved through collaborative coding sessions with two qualitative research specialists who independently coded a subset of transcripts. Coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus-building.

NVivo 12 software was used to organize and manage the large volume of qualitative data, facilitating systematic coding, theme development, and data retrieval. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher maintained an audit trail documenting analytical decisions, emergent insights, and methodological reflections.

f. Research Reflexivity

In conducting this phenomenological investigation of teachers' action research experiences, the researcher acknowledged the influence of his professional background and position in the field. As an Associate Professor with research responsibilities and previous experience mentoring teacher-researchers, the researcher brought insider knowledge of the research process and its challenges, particularly in the Philippine educational context. This positionality offered valuable insights while requiring vigilance against imposing preconceptions on participants' narratives.

The researcher's personal experience conducting research during the pandemic also shaped his approach to this study. Having navigated similar obstacles in his own research endeavors, he recognized the potential for both empathetic understanding and unwitting projection of his experiences onto participants' accounts. To mitigate this, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process, documenting his reactions, assumptions, and potential biases.

Several key reflexive considerations guided this study: (1) awareness that the

researcher's position as an academic might influence how teacher-participants presented their experiences; (2) recognition that the researcher's own pandemic research challenges could color his interpretation of participants' stories; and (3) acknowledgment that his professional commitment to promoting educational research might predispose him toward emphasizing resilience and innovation over struggles and limitations.

To balance these influences, the researcher employed several reflexivity strategies. First, he explicitly bracketed his experiences and assumptions before each interview and during analysis. Second, he incorporated member checking to ensure interpretations resonated with participants' lived experiences rather than his projections. Third, he engaged peer debriefers who challenged his interpretations and identified potential blind spots in his analysis. Finally, he maintained transparency about his positionality throughout the research report, enabling readers to consider how it might have shaped the study findings.Through these reflexive practices, the researcher sought to honor the authentic experiences of teacher-researchers while acknowledging the co-constructed nature of phenomenological understanding.

g. *Ethical Considerations*

This study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to protect participants' wellbeing and dignity throughout the research process. Formal ethical approval was obtained from the Northwestern Samar State University Research Ethics Committee (Protocol No. 2022-09-EDU-AR), and the study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed consent was prioritized as a continuous process rather than a one-time event. Potential participants received comprehensive information about the study's purpose, procedures, time commitments, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research subjects. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, with emphasis on the voluntary nature of participation and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Confidentiality and privacy were strictly maintained. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in all research documents, and identifying information was removed from transcripts and reports. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected devices, with access restricted to the researcher and immediate research team. Participants were informed that while direct quotes might be used in research publications, these would be anonymized and potentially identifiable details modified.

Given the potentially sensitive nature of discussions about professional

challenges, particular attention was paid to participants' emotional wellbeing during interviews. The researcher remained vigilant for signs of distress and was prepared to pause or redirect conversations as needed. Participants were reminded that they could decline to answer specific questions or end the interview at any point. A list of professional support resources was available for participants who might require additional assistance.

Power dynamics were carefully considered, especially given the researcher's position as an academic with connections to educational institutions. Interviews were conducted in a conversational, non-judgmental manner, and the researcher explicitly acknowledged the value of participants' expertise and experiences. Member checking not only enhanced methodological rigor but also empowered participants by giving them input into how their experiences were represented.

The research was designed to benefit participants and the broader educational community. Participants were offered access to study findings and invited to optional workshops where practical implications for enhancing action research during challenging circumstances were discussed. This approach aligned with the ethical principle that research should contribute to the wellbeing of those studied.

Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained reflexive awareness of ethical dimensions, documenting ethical challenges and decisions in a research journal. This reflective practice ensured ongoing attention to participants' dignity, autonomy, and welfare beyond formal ethical requirements.

IV. ResultsandDiscussion

Theme 1: Confronting Pandemic-Related Research Barriers

The first major theme that emerged from the data analysis revealed the diverse and significant challenges teachers encountered when attempting to conduct action research during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges manifested across multiple dimensions of the research process, creating substantial barriers that in some cases led to project delays or discontinuation. Three prominent subthemes emerged within this overarching theme: Data Collection Limitations, Technological and Resource Constraints, and Competing Priorities and Time Scarcity.

Data Collection Limitations

Participants consistently identified data collection as one of the most problematic aspects of conducting action research during the pandemic. The

shift to remote and modular learning modalities severely restricted teachers' ability to implement traditional research methods that relied on in-person interaction. A secondary science teacher from Calbayog City described this challenge:

- "My action research focused on a laboratory-based intervention to improve conceptual understanding in Physics. But when classes moved online, I couldn't implement the hands-on activities I had designed or directly observe students' engagement with the materials. It felt like trying to conduct a swimming experiment without water." (P7)

Many participants reported difficulties in ensuring data quality and reliability when using alternative collection methods. A Grade 4 teacher from Samar Division explained:

- "I had to shift from classroom observations to parent-reported behaviors, but I constantly questioned the consistency and accuracy of these reports. Parents had varying abilities to observe and document their children's learning behaviors, and I couldn't standardize the observation conditions like I would in a classroom." (P15)

Participant recruitment and retention emerged as another significant challenge. The disruption of regular school attendance and the additional stresses experienced by potential research participants (both students and fellow teachers) complicated the sampling process. An elementary teacher from Catbalogan City noted:

- "Many parents declined to have their children participate in additional activities beyond required schoolwork. They were already overwhelmed with modular learning supervision. My sample size decreased from 60 to just 28 students, raising questions about the generalizability of my findings." (P24)

These data collection limitations align with Panela's (2022a) observation that action researchers during the pandemic experienced "a really difficult time adjusting to an out of the ordinary situation." The forced adaptation of research methodologies created uncertainty about data quality and validity, challenging teachers' confidence in their research processes.

Technological and Resource Constraints

Technological limitations significantly impacted teachers' ability to adapt their research methods to remote contexts. Participants reported inequitable access to digital tools among both themselves and their research

subjects, particularly in more remote areas of Samar Island. A high school teacher from a rural area in Samar Division shared:

- "Internet connectivity in our area is extremely unreliable. I tried conducting online interviews, but constant disconnections disrupted the flow of conversation. Some participants could only connect using mobile data, which they couldn't afford to use for lengthy research activities." (P19)

Limited access to research resources and support services compounded these technological constraints. Many participants mentioned difficulties accessing scholarly literature, statistical software, and research mentorship during lockdown periods. A teacher from Calbayog City explained:

- "Before the pandemic, I could visit the division office or university library for journal articles and consult with more experienced researchers in person. During lockdowns, I felt isolated with my research questions and problems, with limited guidance on how to adapt my methods." (P4)

Financial constraints also emerged as a significant barrier, with several participants reporting that pandemic-related economic pressures affected their ability to fund their research activities. A teacher from Catbalogan City noted:

- "My research budget was already minimal, but with additional expenses for data for online interviews and courier services for distributing and collecting research instruments, the costs became prohibitive. I eventually had to scale back my study considerably." (P30)

These findings resonate with the technological challenges documented in Panela's (2022b) study, which found that forming support groups helped educators navigate technological dependence during pandemic transitions.

Competing Priorities and Time Scarcity

Participants consistently described an intensification of workload during the pandemic that severely limited time available for research activities. The rapid transition to remote and modular teaching required substantial additional preparation, leaving little energy or time for research pursuits. A middle school teacher from Calbayog City articulated this challenge:

- "Preparing modules, recording video lessons, and providing individualized feedback to students through various platforms

tripled my workload. By the end of each day, I had no mental capacity left for the focused thinking that research requires. My research timeline extended from six months to nearly two years." (P8)

Many participants also reported experiencing heightened personal and family responsibilities during the pandemic, further constraining their research capacity. A female elementary teacher shared:

- "With my own children at home doing modular learning, I became their teacher too. Add to that the increased household management during lockdowns and caring for elderly parents who couldn't risk exposure... research became a luxury I couldn't afford time-wise." (P11)

The emotional toll of the pandemic also impacted teachers' motivation and capacity to pursue research activities. Several participants described experiencing anxiety, uncertainty, and grief that diminished their research engagement. A teacher from Samar Division reflected:

- "How could I focus on data analysis when colleagues were falling ill, when I was worried about my family's health, when everything felt so uncertain? The psychological weight of the pandemic made scholarly pursuits seem secondary at times." (P21)

This experience aligns with Panela's (2022a) finding that educators during the pandemic felt they "had too much in [their] plate already and not looking into another source of stress." The competing demands on teachers' time, energy, and emotional resources created significant barriers to sustained research engagement.

Theme 2: Adaptive Research Strategies
The second major theme illuminated the innovative ways in which teacher-researchers adapted to pandemic constraints, demonstrating remarkable flexibility and creativity in their research approaches. Despite the significant barriers they faced, many participants developed effective strategies that allowed their research projects to continue in modified forms. This theme comprised three subthemes: Methodological Innovations, Digital Platform Leveraging, and Collaborative Research Communities.

Methodological Innovations
Participants described substantive adaptations to their research methodologies in response to pandemic limitations. Many teachers

reimagined their research designs entirely, shifting from intervention-based studies to descriptive or exploratory approaches more compatible with remote contexts. A high school English teacher from Calbayog City explained:

- "I originally planned a quasi-experimental study comparing two instructional approaches, but that became impossible without classroom access. Instead, I pivoted to a descriptive study examining students' self-reported reading practices during modular learning. This shift actually yielded valuable insights I hadn't anticipated about home literacy environments." (P5)

Several participants demonstrated methodological creativity by adapting traditional data collection tools for remote application. An elementary science teacher described her innovation:

- "I transformed my planned classroom observation protocol into a structured self-documentation tool for students. They recorded videos of themselves completing science tasks at home and reflected on specific aspects of their process. This actually provided richer data than my original plan because I could review the recordings multiple times." (P13)

Many teachers also modified their research timeline and process, adopting more flexible, iterative approaches. A teacher from Catbalogan City shared:

- "Instead of collecting all data at once as originally planned, I implemented a rolling data collection strategy with smaller batches of participants over a longer period. This allowed me to refine my instruments based on initial experiences and adapt to changing pandemic restrictions." (P29)

These methodological adaptations reflect what Panela (2022a) described as teachers "exploring new ways of doing action researches during the pandemic," demonstrating their capacity to reimagine research approaches rather than simply abandoning their inquiry goals.

Digital Platform Leveraging

Teachers who successfully continued their research during the pandemic effectively harnessed various digital platforms and tools, often learning new technologies specifically for their research purposes. A secondary mathematics teacher from Samar Division described this process:

- "I had never used digital surveys before, but I taught myself how to create effective forms using Google Forms and analyzed the

data using Excel functions I learned through YouTube tutorials. The pandemic forced me to develop technology skills that will benefit my research even after restrictions end." (P18)

Many participants creatively utilized social media platforms and messaging applications as research tools, converting these familiar technologies into effective channels for data collection and participant engagement. An elementary teacher explained:

- "I created a private Facebook group for my research participants where I could post prompts, conduct polls, and facilitate focused discussions. Parents were already comfortable with Facebook, so participation was much higher than when I attempted formal online surveys." (P12)

Several teachers employed video conferencing platforms beyond basic interviewing, developing interactive research activities that could be conducted synchronously despite physical separation. A science teacher from Calbayog City shared an innovative approach:

- "For my action research on collaborative problem-solving, I used Zoom's breakout room and screen sharing features to create virtual problem-solving sessions. I could record these sessions and analyze the interactions in greater detail than would have been possible in a physical classroom where I could only observe one group at a time." (P3)

This digital adaptation aligns with Panela's (2022b) findings regarding teachers "tackling the trials of techno dependence," where educators found ways to leverage technology despite initial challenges. Teachers' willingness to learn new digital research methods demonstrated their commitment to continuing their inquiry despite challenging circumstances.

Collaborative Research Communities

Perhaps the most significant adaptation strategy that emerged from participants' experiences was the development of supportive research communities and partnerships. Many teachers formed or joined informal research groups where they could share challenges, exchange ideas, and provide mutual encouragement. A teacher from Catbalogan City described this experience:

- "Five of us from different schools started a weekly virtual research circle. We would troubleshoot each other's research challenges, review instruments, practice interview techniques, and sometimes just provide emotional support when motivation

was low. This community kept my research alive when I might otherwise have abandoned it." (P27)

Several participants established research partnerships that allowed for resource sharing and distributed research responsibilities. A teacher from Samar Division explained:

- "A colleague and I merged our separate but related research interests into a collaborative project. We divided tasks according to our strengths and available resources—I handled literature review and instrument development since I had better internet access, while she managed participant communication since she had stronger community connections. Together we accomplished what neither could have done alone during this difficult period." (P20)

Some teachers engaged students as research collaborators rather than just subjects, developing participatory approaches that distributed research activities. A high school teacher shared:

- "I trained six senior students as co-researchers who helped collect data from their peers through online focus groups. This not only solved my access problems but enriched the research with insider perspectives I couldn't have gained otherwise. It became a valuable learning experience for these students too." (P9)

This finding strongly echoes Panela's (2022b) observation that "forming faculty support groups gave the necessary boost to really perform beyond expectations and fully utilize the abilities of each member of the team." The collaborative dimension of research adaptation emerged as not merely a coping strategy but a transformative enhancement to teachers' research practice.

Theme 3: Transformative Professional Growth

The third major theme captured the profound ways in which pandemic research experiences transformed teachers' professional identities, competencies, and perspectives. Despite—and sometimes because of—the challenges they faced, participants reported significant professional growth that extended beyond specific research skills. This theme encompassed three subthemes: Enhanced Research Resilience, Expanded Research Competence, and Deepened Professional Purpose.

Enhanced Research Resilience

Participants consistently described developing greater persistence and adaptability in their research practice as a result of navigating pandemic challenges. Many who completed their research projects despite significant obstacles reported a newfound confidence in their ability to overcome research difficulties. A teacher from Calbayog City reflected:

- "Before the pandemic, I might have abandoned my research at the first major roadblock. Now, having successfully completed a study under these extreme conditions, I feel like I can handle almost any research challenge. My research resilience has been forged in the pandemic fire." (P6)

Several teachers noted that the pandemic experience had transformed their perception of research barriers from insurmountable obstacles to solvable problems requiring creative approaches. A teacher from Samar Division explained:

- "I've developed what I call a 'workaround mindset.' Rather than seeing constraints as endpoints, I automatically start thinking about alternative paths. This mental flexibility will serve me in all future research endeavors, regardless of circumstances." (P17)

Many participants also described developing greater emotional resilience specifically related to research setbacks. A secondary teacher from Catbalogan City shared:

- "I learned to cope with research disappointments and frustrations without taking them personally. When data collection methods failed or participation dropped, I no longer saw it as my failure but as a normal part of the research process requiring adjustment. This emotional detachment while maintaining commitment has made me a more balanced researcher." (P28)

This enhanced resilience aligns with Panela's (2022a) observation that teachers during the pandemic "persevere to do what they can...and instill light and hope not only to themselves but for the people they are serving" despite challenging circumstances.

Expanded Research Competence

Participants reported significant expansion of their research skill sets, often in areas they would not have explored under normal circumstances. Many teachers developed new methodological competencies that broadened their research repertoire. A teacher from Catbalogan City explained:

- "I had always relied on surveys and basic statistical analysis in

my previous research. The pandemic forced me to learn qualitative methods like virtual ethnography and thematic analysis. I discovered I actually prefer these approaches for the rich understanding they provide of educational experiences." (P25)

Digital research skills featured prominently in teachers' accounts of expanded competence. Many participants described accelerated technology learning curves that enhanced their research capabilities. An elementary teacher from Samar Division reflected:

- "I've gained confidence with digital research tools I had previously avoided—online survey platforms, digital data analysis software, virtual collaboration tools. These skills have not only sustained my pandemic research but positioned me as a resource person for colleagues beginning their own digital research journeys." (P16)

Several teachers noted developing stronger critical thinking and problem-solving abilities through the process of adapting their research designs. A high school teacher shared:

- "Constantly having to evaluate the feasibility and validity of alternative approaches sharpened my analytical thinking. I became more mindful of methodological decisions and their implications, rather than following conventional research designs without question." (P2)

This expanded competence reflects Panela's (2022a) finding that teachers during the pandemic were "slowly developing a new habit of researching and fully utilizing the convenience provided to complete it," suggesting that adaptation necessitated skill development that ultimately enhanced research capacity.

Deepened Professional Purpose

Perhaps the most profound aspect of teachers' transformative growth involved a deeper connection to the purpose and value of educational research in their professional lives. Many participants described a clarified understanding of why they conduct research despite institutional and contextual challenges. A teacher from Calbayog City reflected:

- "The pandemic stripped away the external motivations for research—compliance requirements, performance evaluations, professional advancement. What remained was the core purpose: to understand and improve educational practice. This

clarity of purpose has made my research more meaningful and focused on questions that truly matter." (P1)

Several teachers reported that their pandemic research experiences fostered a stronger integration of their researcher and teacher identities. A secondary teacher explained:

- "Before, I saw action research as something separate from teaching—an additional task. Now I understand research as an extension of my teaching practice, a natural way of responding to classroom questions and challenges. The boundaries between teaching and researching have blurred in the most productive way." (P10)

Many participants also described a heightened appreciation for the societal importance of educational research, particularly during periods of systemic disruption. A teacher from Samar Division shared:

- "Conducting research during the pandemic showed me that educational inquiry isn't a luxury—it's essential for responding to crises. Our classroom-level insights about what worked and what didn't during emergency remote learning have significant policy implications. I now see teacher-researchers as critical knowledge producers during periods of educational transformation." (P22)

This deepened sense of purpose connects to Panela's (2022a) observation that teachers during the pandemic came to see challenges as "a good avenue to learn something new and be innovative not only with my research but how I do it," suggesting a transformative reframing of research identity through crisis navigation.

Figure 1

Mind Map of Teachers' Action Research Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic
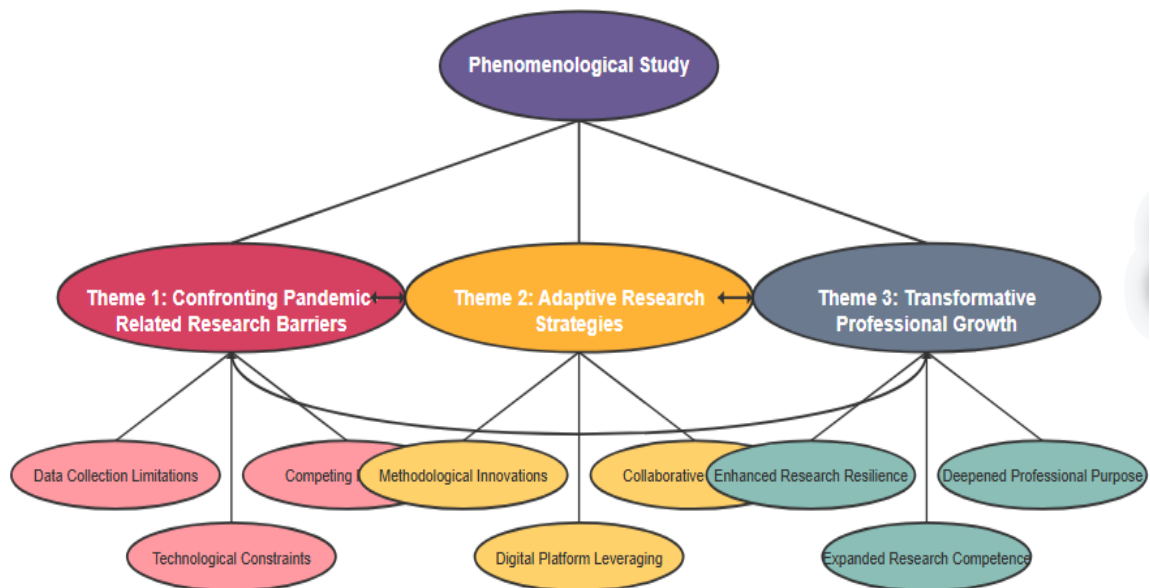
The mind map illustrates the interrelationships between the challenges teachers faced (Theme 1), the adaptive strategies they developed (Theme 2), and the professional growth they experienced (Theme 3). The bidirectional arrows indicate the dynamic nature of these relationships, where challenges prompted adaptive strategies, which in turn fostered professional growth, while enhanced professional capacities enabled more effective adaptation to ongoing challenges.

V.   ConclusionandRecommendation

Conclusion

This phenomenological study provides rich insights into the lived experiences of basic education teachers in Samar Island who conducted action research during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through in-depth analysis of 32 teachers' narratives, the study revealed a complex landscape of challenges, adaptations, and transformative growth that characterized their research journeys during this unprecedented period.

The first major theme, "Confronting Pandemic-Related Research Barriers," illuminated the substantial obstacles teachers encountered in their research endeavors, including data collection limitations, technological and resource constraints, and competing priorities amid increased workloads. These findings align with previous research on pandemic-related educational disruptions (Akbulaev et al., 2020; ILO, 2020) and extend understanding of how these

disruptions specifically impacted teacher-led research activities.

Despite these formidable challenges, the second theme, "Adaptive Research Strategies," demonstrated teachers' remarkable capacity for innovation and flexibility. Participants developed methodological innovations, leveraged digital platforms in creative ways, and formed collaborative research communities that enabled continued research progress. This adaptive resilience echoes Panela's (2022a, 2022b) observations about teachers' capacity to explore new approaches and form supportive networks during pandemic transitions.

Perhaps most significantly, the third theme, "Transformative Professional Growth," revealed how pandemic research experiences fostered enhanced research resilience, expanded research competencies, and deepened professional purpose among participants. These transformative outcomes suggest that the process of navigating research challenges during crisis conditions can catalyze professional development in ways that extend beyond specific research skills to encompass broader professional identity and practice.

Collectively, these findings contribute valuable understanding of how educational action research can persist and evolve amid crisis contexts. The experiences of teachers in Samar Island highlight both the vulnerability and resilience of educational research practices during disruptions. Their narratives demonstrate that while the pandemic created significant research barriers, it also catalyzed innovation, collaboration, and professional reflection that may have enduring benefits for their research practice.

The study also underscores the importance of systemic support for teacher-researchers during challenging times. While participant experiences reflected remarkable individual and collective resilience, they also revealed gaps in institutional infrastructure, technological resources, and research support mechanisms that could have better sustained research activities during the pandemic. Addressing these gaps represents an important opportunity for strengthening research capacity within the basic education sector, particularly in geographically isolated regions like Samar Island.

Ultimately, this phenomenological inquiry reveals that the experience of conducting action research during the COVID-19 pandemic was not merely a story of obstacles and constraints, but also one of adaptation, growth, and renewed purpose. As one participant eloquently stated: "The pandemic didn't stop our research journey—it transformed it. We found new paths, new companions, and new strengths we didn't know we had." This transformation of research practice under pressure offers valuable lessons for educational research resilience in future crisis

contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen action research practice and support systems for teacher-researchers, particularly during challenging circumstances:

- o **Enhance Institutional Support Infrastructure**
    1. Establish dedicated research support units within school divisions that can provide technical assistance, resource access, and mentorship even during disruptions.
    2. Develop flexible research policies and guidelines that accommodate alternative methodologies and timelines during crisis situations.
    3. Allocate specific budget resources for supporting teacher-researchers with technology needs and research materials.
- o **Expand Virtual Research Training Opportunities**
    1. Develop comprehensive online modules on diverse research methodologies suitable for remote and disrupted contexts.
    2. Provide targeted training on digital research tools, virtual data collection strategies, and online collaboration platforms.
    3. Create accessible repositories of exemplary action research conducted during challenging circumstances to serve as models and inspiration.
- o **Implement Flexible Research Frameworks**
    1. Design and promote adaptive research models that can be readily modified in response to changing circumstances.
    2. Develop guidelines for ensuring methodological rigor while employing alternative and remote data collection approaches.
    3. Validate diverse research outputs beyond traditional formats, recognizing creative and innovative research dissemination.
- o **Foster Collaborative Research Networks**
    1. Establish formal structures for research collaboration among teachers within and across schools, including virtual research communities of practice.
    2. Create mentorship programs pairing experienced and novice teacher-researchers to provide guidance during challenging research contexts.
    3. Develop partnerships with higher education institutions that can provide additional research support and resources during disruptions.

- o **Address Technological and Resource Gaps**
    1. Prioritize improvement of internet connectivity in schools and teacher workspaces to support digital research activities.
    2. Provide teachers with necessary digital tools for research purposes, including devices, software, and access to online databases.
    3. Establish research resource centers at division levels with both physical and digital materials accessible to teacher-researchers.
- o **Integrate Research and Teaching Practice**
    1. Develop professional development programs that strengthen the connection between classroom teaching and action research.
    2. Recognize and incentivize action research that directly responds to educational challenges during crisis situations.
    3. Create structured opportunities for teachers to share research insights and innovations that enhance educational practice during disruptions.
- o **Expand the Research Knowledge Base**
    1. Conduct further studies on effective action research methodologies for disrupted educational contexts.
    2. Document and disseminate successful research adaptations and innovations developed during the pandemic.
    3. Investigate the long-term impacts of pandemic-era research adaptations on teachers' research practice and professional identity.

These recommendations aim to build upon the resilience and innovation demonstrated by teacher-researchers in this study, while addressing the systemic challenges they encountered. By strengthening both individual capacity and institutional support for educational action research, the education sector can enhance its ability to generate valuable evidence-based insights even during future crisis situations.

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