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## Sharpening the Saw: Lived Experiences of Filipino Elementary Teachers in Pursuit of Webinar-Based Professional Development

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### ABSTRACT

The rapid digital transformation in education has reshaped professional development with webinar-based training emerging as a widely adopted alternative to traditional in-person programs. However, questions remain regarding its effectiveness and impact on educators' satisfaction and engagement. This study investigated the factors influencing Filipino elementary educators' experiences with webinar-based professional development, comparing its perceived benefits and limitations to conventional face-to-face training. Using a phenomenological approach, qualitative data were collected from educators who participated in webinar-based sessions. Thematic analysis identified key determinants of satisfaction and engagement, including content relevance, presenter expertise, interactivity, and the usability of the technology platform. While participants acknowledged the accessibility and convenience of webinars, they also highlighted challenges, particularly the diminished opportunities for direct interaction and hands-on activities. Despite these limitations, many educators favored a hybrid model that combines the flexibility of webinars with the engagement of in-person training to enhance learning outcomes. The findings suggested that webinar-based professional development is most effective when it incorporates interactive elements, is led by expert facilitators, and is supported by user-friendly technology. These insights provide valuable implications for education policymakers and training providers in designing more effective digital professional development programs. Future research should explore the long-term impact of webinars on teaching practices and investigate how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, could further enhance online professional learning experiences.

### INTRODUCTION

The rise of webinar-based professional development has transformed the educational landscape, offering flexible and accessible learning opportunities for educators. These online platforms have become increasingly popular due to their cost-effectiveness and convenience, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many institutions shifted from face-to-face interactions to digital learning environments (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2022). However, the transition has raised questions about the effectiveness of webinars compared to traditional in-person training, especially regarding the depth of engagement and sustained professional growth. Research indicates that while webinars offer convenience, they may also limit opportunities for spontaneous interaction and collaborative learning (Mabuan, 2022).

A growing body of literature highlights the importance of engagement in determining the success of webinar-based professional development. When participants are actively engaged, their satisfaction with the training increases, leading to a higher likelihood of transferring learned skills to their professional practice (Gegenfurtner *et al.*, 2020). However, engagement in virtual environments can be challenging due to screen fatigue, distractions, and a lack of social presence (Dayagbil *et al.*, 2024). Studies suggest that the design and delivery of webinars significantly impact engagement, with interactive features such as polls, discussions, and breakout rooms contributing

to more meaningful learning experiences (Alvarez & Corcuera, 2021).

Despite these challenges, webinar-based training has positively impacted educators' teaching practices and professional growth. Webinars provide opportunities for educators to access diverse perspectives and specialized content that may not be available in their local contexts (Sharma & Alvi, 2022). Additionally, webinars allow on-demand access to learning materials, enabling educators to revisit content at their own pace and apply new knowledge when ready (Littlejohn & Hood, 2021). This flexibility is particularly beneficial for educators balancing teaching responsibilities with ongoing professional development, allowing them to continuously learn without disrupting their schedules.

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of educators participating in webinar-based professional development, focusing on three key dimensions: engagement, effectiveness, and impact on teaching practices. By examining these dimensions, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on online professional development, offering insights into how webinars can be optimized to enhance educator satisfaction, engagement, and professional growth. Through a deeper understanding of these experiences, this study will provide recommendations for designing more effective and impactful webinar-based training programs.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of webinar-based professional development (WBPD) has shifted how educators engage in continuous learning. Webinars offer an accessible, cost-effective way for teachers to develop new skills, with increasing relevance in the post-pandemic era. Recent research has focused on the pedagogical implications of WBPD, highlighting that webinars' flexibility allows educators to participate in professional development without geographical constraints (Mabuan, 2022). However, studies have also raised concerns about the effectiveness of these platforms in fostering deep engagement compared to traditional, face-to-face training (Dayagbil *et al.*, 2024).

A key theme in WBPD literature is the importance of engagement in virtual environments. Active engagement is crucial for successfully transferring knowledge from webinars to classroom practice (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2022). However, maintaining participant engagement can be challenging due to the digital format's limitations, such as screen fatigue and reduced social interaction (Gegenfurtner *et al.*, 2020). Innovative strategies like incorporating interactive elements and providing opportunities for peer collaboration have been found to enhance engagement and improve learning outcomes (Alvarez & Corcuera, 2021).

In terms of effectiveness, recent studies show mixed results regarding WBPD's impact on teaching practices. While webinars offer convenience and access to diverse perspectives, some educators find them less effective than traditional methods due to limited opportunities for hands-on learning and immediate feedback (Perkasa, 2023). Nevertheless, many educators report positive experiences with WBPD, mainly when webinars are designed with clear objectives and incorporate interactive components that mirror real-life teaching scenarios (Littlejohn & Hood, 2021). This aligns with findings that suggest well-designed webinars can be just as effective as in-person professional development in promoting teacher growth and innovation (Sharma & Alvi, 2022).

The impact of WBPD on professional growth extends beyond the immediate acquisition of new skills. Research indicates that webinars can play a critical role in fostering a continuous learning culture among educators. By offering opportunities for self-paced learning and access to a broad range of experts, WBPD contributes to long-term professional development (Sharma & Alvi, 2022). Moreover, WBPD is particularly beneficial for educators in remote or underserved areas, providing them with resources that might otherwise be unavailable (Blau *et al.*, 2023). This makes webinars an essential tool in the broader effort to democratize access to quality professional development.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore factors influencing educators' satisfaction and engagement with webinar-based training. A phenomenological approach was chosen to capture

participants' lived experiences, allowing an in-depth understanding of how they perceive and experience webinar-based professional development.

### Participants

The participants in this study were educators from various elementary schools across the Southern Philippines. A purposive sampling method was used to select 15 participants who had attended at least one webinar-based professional development session in the past year. These participants were chosen to ensure a range of perspectives across different educational levels and teaching experiences. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via online video conferencing platforms. The interviews were designed to explore participants' experiences with webinar-based training, focusing on factors influencing their satisfaction and engagement. The interview guide included open-ended questions: "What aspects of webinar-based training contributed to your satisfaction?" and "How do you engage with the content during webinars?" Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was recorded with the participants' permission.

In addition to interviews, participants were asked to complete a brief demographic survey, which provided information on their teaching background, years of experience, and frequency of participation in webinars. This survey data helped contextualize the qualitative findings.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview transcripts. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, which includes familiarizing the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The transcripts were read multiple times to ensure a deep understanding of the content, and initial codes were generated based on recurring patterns in the data. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences.

To enhance the reliability of the analysis, two independent researchers coded the data, and any discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus. NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and analyzing the data, ensuring that the themes were grounded in the participants' responses.

### Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research with human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring they were aware of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality

was maintained by anonymizing participants' data, and the recorded interviews were stored securely to protect participants' privacy.

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, several strategies were implemented. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm that the themes accurately reflected their experiences. Additionally, the study utilized triangulation by comparing interview data with relevant literature on webinar-based professional development. Peer debriefing sessions were also held with fellow researchers to review the coding process and thematic analysis, enhancing the credibility of the findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study revealed the impact of webinar-based training on educators' teaching practices and their professional growth, several key factors influencing their satisfaction and engagement with webinar-based training, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of these sessions compared to traditional in-person professional development. The discussion below elaborates on these findings about existing literature and highlights their implications for future practice.

*Research Question 1: In what ways do educators feel that webinar-based training has impacted their teaching practices and professional growth?*

The first research question explored the factors that influenced participants' satisfaction and engagement with webinar-based training. The thematic analysis revealed several significant factors, including content relevance, presenter expertise, interactivity, and the usability of the technology platform. These themes are discussed with existing literature, highlighting their implications for webinar-based professional development.

### **Content Relevance and Quality**

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of content relevance and quality as a critical determinant of their satisfaction with webinar-based training. When the content directly addressed their professional needs and applied to their classroom practices, participants reported higher levels of engagement. This finding is supported by research that underscores the necessity of aligning professional development content with educators' specific instructional contexts to increase the likelihood of application and impact (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Furthermore, content perceived as up-to-date and research-based contributes to the perceived value of the training, as Darling-Hammond *et al.* (2017) suggested. Therefore, for webinar-based training to be practical, it must be carefully tailored to address educators' immediate needs and challenges.

### **Presenter Expertise and Engagement Skills**

Another critical factor influencing participants'

satisfaction was the expertise and presentation skills of the facilitators. Participants appreciated webinars led by knowledgeable presenters who could effectively engage the audience. This finding aligns with existing literature, which indicates that the presenter's credibility and ability to convey information engagingly significantly impact participants' engagement and overall satisfaction (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). Effective presenters deliver content and create a learning environment that encourages participation and maintains attention throughout the session. Therefore, selecting expert presenters who are skilled in online facilitation is crucial for the success of webinar-based professional development.

### **Interactivity and Engagement**

The level of interactivity in webinars emerged as another important theme. Participants valued opportunities for interaction, such as Q&A sessions, polls, and breakout rooms, which helped them stay engaged and feel connected to the content and their peers. This finding is consistent with research by Martin and Bolliger (2018), which suggests that interactive elements in online professional development contribute to higher engagement and satisfaction levels. Interactive components allow participants to clarify their understanding, ask questions, and exchange ideas with others, creating a more collaborative and dynamic learning experience. Therefore, incorporating interactive features in webinar design can enhance participants' engagement and overall satisfaction.

### **Usability of Technology**

The usability of the technology platform used for the webinar was another factor that influenced participants' experiences. A smooth, user-friendly platform contributed to a more seamless and enjoyable learning experience, allowing participants to focus on the content rather than grappling with technical difficulties. This finding echoes research that highlights the importance of reliable and accessible technology in online learning environments (Bennett & Lockyer, 2022). Conversely, technical issues can detract from the learning experience, causing frustration and reducing engagement. Therefore, ensuring the chosen technology platform is reliable, easy to navigate, and accessible to all participants is essential for successful webinar-based professional development.

*Research Question 2: How do educators perceive the effectiveness of webinar-based training compared to traditional in-person professional development?*

The second research question explored how educators perceive the effectiveness of webinar-based training compared to traditional in-person professional development. The responses revealed a nuanced understanding of both formats, highlighting their advantages and limitations. The discussion here delves into these perspectives while linking them to existing literature.

### **Convenience and Accessibility of Webinar-Based Training**

One prominent theme that emerged was the convenience and accessibility of webinar-based training. Participants frequently mentioned that webinars offer a flexible and convenient mode of professional development, allowing them to attend sessions from the comfort of their homes or workplaces. This flexibility is particularly advantageous for educators with demanding schedules or those in remote locations where attending in-person sessions may be challenging. These findings align with recent research emphasizing the accessibility of online professional development for educators across different geographical areas (Hawkes & Halverson, 2022). Webinars reduce logistical barriers and enable broader participation in professional learning opportunities.

Despite these advantages, participants also raised concerns about the lack of personal interaction in webinar-based training compared to traditional in-person sessions. Many participants expressed that while webinars offer valuable content, they often miss the face-to-face interactions, networking opportunities, and collaborative discussions that in-person sessions provide. This reflects findings from previous studies that indicate a potential shortcoming of online professional development in fostering deep connections and real-time collaboration (Trust & Horrocks, 2019). The absence of these elements in webinars can limit the depth of engagement and reduce opportunities for immediate feedback and discussion.

### **Hybrid Models and Blended Learning**

Participants acknowledged that while webinars are effective for content delivery, they may be more beneficial when combined with traditional in-person training. This view supports the idea of hybrid or blended learning models, which integrate the strengths of both online and face-to-face formats. In recent literature, hybrid models have enhanced professional development by allowing flexible, self-paced learning and rich, collaborative experiences (Hadar *et al.*, 2020). By blending webinars with in-person sessions, educators can benefit from the convenience of online training while still engaging in hands-on activities and real-time interactions during face-to-face sessions.

Additionally, participants highlighted the potential for webinars to serve as ongoing supplementary training rather than a complete replacement for traditional professional development. They viewed webinars as valuable tools for keeping up-to-date with new trends, policies, and teaching strategies in between more intensive in-person workshops. This finding aligns with research that suggests online professional development can complement traditional methods by providing continuous learning opportunities (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Webinars allow educators to access timely information and updates, which can help them adapt to new challenges in their classrooms without waiting for the next in-person training session.

### **Quality of Interaction and Engagement**

Another key theme was the quality of interaction and engagement in webinars compared to traditional professional development. Participants noted that webinars often lack the dynamic, interactive environments of in-person sessions, where they can engage in hands-on activities, small group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving. The more passive nature of webinars, where participants primarily listen to presentations with limited interaction, can reduce the overall engagement and impact. This concern is supported by research indicating that the level of interactivity in online professional development influences participants' engagement and satisfaction (Martin & Bolliger, 2018).

To address this limitation, many participants suggested that webinar-based training could be improved by incorporating more interactive elements, such as breakout sessions, real-time polls, and collaborative activities. These strategies increase engagement and foster community among participants, even in a virtual environment (Bennett & Lockyer, 2022). By enhancing the interactivity of webinars, training providers can create more engaging and effective professional development experiences for educators.

*Research Question 3: What factors influence educators' satisfaction and engagement with webinar-based training?*

The third research question explored how educators perceive the impact of webinar-based training on their teaching practices and professional growth. The thematic analysis revealed that participants experienced both positive and nuanced effects, including increased access to new teaching strategies, opportunities for reflective practice, and professional networking. These insights are discussed in light of the existing literature, offering a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of webinar-based professional development.

### **Adoption of New Teaching Strategies**

One key theme was the adoption of new teaching strategies learned through webinar-based training. Many participants reported that webinars provided them with practical tools and innovative instructional methods that they could directly implement in their classrooms. This aligns with research indicating that effective professional development enables educators to acquire new skills to enhance their instructional practices (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). By offering access to current pedagogical trends and expert insights, webinars help teachers stay updated on best practices, ultimately enriching their teaching repertoire and benefiting student outcomes (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

### **Reflection and Continuous Learning**

Another significant theme was reflection and continuous learning. Participants mentioned that webinars encouraged them to reflect on their teaching practices, prompting them to evaluate what works and needs

improvement critically. This reflective process is essential for professional growth, fostering a deeper understanding of one's instructional approaches and encouraging lifelong learning (Schön, 1987). The flexibility of webinars, which allows educators to revisit recorded sessions and continue learning at their own pace, further supports this ongoing reflective practice (Bennett & Lockyer, 2022). Thus, webinars contribute to a continuous improvement culture, where educators are empowered to refine their practices over time.

### Professional Networking and Collaboration

The theme of professional networking and collaboration also emerged from the data. Although webinar-based training may lack the face-to-face interaction of traditional professional development, participants noted that it offered opportunities to connect with educators from different regions and backgrounds. These virtual connections facilitated the exchange of ideas, resources, and experiences, enriching participants' professional networks (Trust & Horrocks, 2019). Networking is a critical component of professional development, as it allows educators to collaborate, seek advice, and share best practices, all of which contribute to their professional growth (Lieberman & Mace, 2010). Webinars, especially those with interactive features like breakout rooms and discussion forums, can foster meaningful professional relationships even in a virtual setting.

### Empowerment and Professional Confidence

Finally, participants reported feeling more empowered and confident in their teaching after engaging in webinar-based professional development. The exposure to new ideas, tools, and networks enhanced their professional confidence, enabling them to experiment with innovative teaching approaches and tackle challenges with greater assurance. This sense of empowerment is critical for fostering a growth mindset among educators, as it encourages them to take risks, innovate, and continuously improve their practice (Dweck, 2006). The literature supports the idea that professional development that enhances teachers' self-efficacy and confidence can lead to sustained improvements in teaching quality (Desimone & Garet, 2015).

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant factors influencing educators' satisfaction and engagement with webinar-based professional development, including content relevance, presenter expertise, interactivity, and technology usability. While webinars offer notable advantages in terms of convenience and accessibility, they also present challenges related to reduced interaction and engagement compared to traditional in-person sessions. The findings suggest that webinars are most effective when they are carefully designed to be interactive, led by expert facilitators, and supported by user-friendly technology. Additionally, the study underscores the

potential of hybrid professional development models that combine the strengths of both online and face-to-face learning formats. These insights contribute to the growing research on online professional development and offer practical recommendations for designing more effective webinar-based training programs.

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