

First-Hand Insights of Novice Teachers in Entrepreneurial Cooperative Schools

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400440>

Received: 20 April 2026; Accepted: 25 April 2026; Published: 13 May 2026

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the lived experiences of novice teachers in entrepreneurial cooperative schools in the Philippines. These schools offer a value-oriented alternative to private schools, especially given that so many teachers are burning out. The research was conducted at one cooperative school in the Quezon IV district of Bukidnon. It addresses a critical gap: these schools offer promising teamwork and fortitude but lack sufficient information about why novice teachers choose them, what problems they face, what they gain, and what advice they offer in resource-minimal settings. The aim was to determine why they chose these jobs, what challenges they faced, what benefits they gained, and what advice they would give others. We intentionally selected 15 novice teachers with less than 2 years of on-the-job experience. We conducted open-ended interviews and analyzed excerpts to identify four main themes. They appreciated team support, shared plans, and encouragement/guidance from experienced teachers to get started. But real issues arise: insufficient supplies or technology, extensive responsibilities, pressure to bring in more students through local outreach, and administrative stagnation. Despite all of these, they emerged more resilient, navigating adversity, taking charge of small projects, and developing intrapreneurial leadership to foster institutional sustainability. Their advice was practical to stay flexible, utilize team capacity, and integrate abstract principles with practical applications. The results show that these schools have significant potential but are underdeveloped. The study calls for better training programs, equitable resource distribution and manageable workloads to retain teachers.

Keywords: Novice teachers, entrepreneurial cooperative schools, teacher challenges, collaborative environment /teamwork

INTRODUCTION

Novice teachers often choose between entrepreneurial cooperatives and traditional private schools to gain experience. These institutions serve as a training ground for novices before applying to public schools. Novice teachers are often unaware of the difference between the two and mostly think that everything will be fine and that it will all fall into place after being hired. Just like any other school, basics are missing, like no internet and scarce supplies or proper classrooms in most of the private schools, locally. A private individual or organization runs a private school and offers a curriculum that may be focused on specific values of the school, such as religion, beliefs or theories (*The Difference between Private Schools and Public Schools*, n.d.). At the same time, a cooperative school embeds cooperative values and principles. It includes open membership, equal democratic participation and accountability from those who manage the school.

That's why this study is conducted in the Quezon IV district of Bukidnon to understand why novice teachers chose cooperative schools over traditional private ones, the challenges they faced, the benefits they gained and the insights they can share with others. According to Felisilda et al. (2024), novice teachers in the Philippines and internationally often select initial placements in private or cooperative-oriented schools as stepping stones to public school roles, but limited awareness of institutional differences leads to unmet expectations around resources and support. Recent studies from 2019-2026 highlight common challenges, such as resource shortages in private schools, alongside potential cooperative benefits, such as democratic governance, though direct comparisons remain sparse. Few studies directly address novice preferences for cooperatives over

private schools, but cooperative models appeal because of their embedded values promoting equality and shared management, which contrast with private schools' top-down structures. Teacher cooperatives in the Philippines have been linked to improved access to resources and professional support, drawing novices seeking community-oriented settings before public transitions. Internationally, integrating cooperative learning in schools builds teachers' collaboration skills, thereby indirectly influencing choices to foster supportive cultures (Fe & Acosta, 2025).

Novice teachers universally report classroom management, time pressures, diverse learner needs, heavy workloads, and resource scarcity in private schools. Local Philippine studies in Cagayan de Oro (2023-2024) and in private settings (2025) confirm these, exacerbated by pandemic shifts to online learning and poor internet access in remote areas. In cooperatives, implementation hurdles mirror cooperative learning challenges, such as student engagement and preparation, though these are less documented in full school models (Pagutayao, 2025). According to Eugenio (2025), Private schools provide smaller classes, specialized curricula, and higher graduation rates, aiding novice skill-building despite resource gaps. Cooperatives offer democratic participation, resource sharing via membership, and professional growth through mentorship, potentially reducing isolation. Both serve as training grounds, with novices gaining adaptability and insights, such as building learning circles and aligning with mentors for future public roles.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study explores the lived experiences of three novice teachers across cooperative school environments. It aims to find out why they chose their careers, the downsides they face, what benefits they get from it and recommendations for those who would go into the field. This study was conducted at a single cooperative school in the Quezon IV district of Bukidnon, Philippines.

Participants

Fifteen early-career teachers with less than 2 years of experience were purposively sampled across the school's early-career teaching cohort. This number provides sufficient coverage of the targeted population.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were individually administered. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted separately with participants, following a pilot-tested protocol comprising four open-ended questions. They resulted in audio recordings, taken with individual verbal consent, made in quiet spaces throughout campus. All interviews were fully transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Colaizzi, 1978) was used as follows: (1) read all transcripts thoroughly; (2) extract significant statements; (3) formulate meanings; (4) cluster meanings into themes; (5) develop exhaustive descriptions; and condense these into core structures and validate them with participants. This rigorous process is in accordance with purposive sampling and thematic analysis of Philippine studies on novice teacher challenges (Consunji, 2025); (Felisilda et al., 2024) to studying early-career educators within a collaborative context of schools Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Creagh et al., 2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals why novice teachers chose entrepreneurial cooperative schools and the challenges they've faced while in the institution. This section presents the data, together with discussion, analysis, and suggestions. Thematic analysis identified existing patterns.

Reasons for Choosing Entrepreneurial Cooperative Schools

Theme: Craving Teamwork and Growth Opportunities

New teachers chose these cooperative schools because they wanted real backup from united teamwork, mentors to lean on, and opportunities to build skills far better than in the individualistic atmosphere of cutthroat private schools. The analysis shows that participants valued a welcoming environment for beginners, shared responsibilities that fostered growth, and alignment with their personal philosophies of community involvement.

From the perspective of teacher development theory, this exemplifies the early-career requirements for guided participation and "legitimate peripheral participation," in which novices learn by practicing alongside knowledgeable others and are socialized into a community of practice. This cooperative context, where teachers become partners in their work rather than just employees, guides novices as they move from dependence to growing independence, while maintaining a sense of safety and appreciation.

Using an organizational learning lens, the reliance on collaboration and collective decision-making suggests a school that defines itself as a learning organization. Professional learning is reciprocal, as it supports both individual and collective improvement by co-constructing knowledge through collaboration, mentoring, and problem-solving.

Q1P1: "cooperative school embraces unity and shared responsibilities... teachers like me are being valued as partners... decision making, teamwork, and support."

Q1P2: "feels more supportive and welcoming... sense of teamwork and shared values encourages... as I grow as a teacher."

Q1P3: "values of cooperation, shared responsibility... collaboration among teachers, parents... learn from experienced colleagues, receive guidance."

Q1P6: "provides meaningful support, mentorship, and professional growth opportunities... sense of unity and collective purpose."

Q1P14: "more supportive and collaborative environment... teachers help one another, share resources."

Philippine studies support this theme of collaboration by drawing in novice teachers. Cagayan de Oro research shows that new teachers are drawn to strong support systems even as they wrestle with early struggles (Felisilda et al., 2024). Valencia City work ties team-up chances directly to what helps them grow on the job (*Collaboration Opportunities and Workload on Professional Development Access of Public-School Teachers - International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science (IJRIAS)*, 2024). DepEd's K-12 overhaul discussion points to teachers leaning toward spots built on real teamwork (Magallanes et al., 2022).

Internationally, studies affirm motivations for collaborative settings. U.S. studies on new teachers stress that mentorship and backup shine brightest in schools that skip cutthroat competition (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Australian workload studies show that teamwork can reduce professional isolation (Creagh et al., 2023).

Seen through the lens of teacher development and organizational learning theories, these findings suggest that entrepreneurial cooperative schools are attractive because they offer a "safe yet demanding" environment where novices can gradually stretch their skills while being embedded in a learning-oriented community.

Challenges in Entrepreneurial Cooperative Schools

Theme: Multifaceted Resource and Workload Constraints

This theme reflects persistent stressors such as limited materials and facilities, heavy and multiple responsibilities, enrollment-driven pay incentives, and administrative inconsistencies that overwhelm novices. their sense of sustainability and professional efficacy in an entrepreneurial school context.

The pressures are similarly reflected in the early career teachers' "survival" stage of teacher development, where meeting the day-to-day demands of their role often eclipses nuanced professional growth. When novice teachers are thrust into quasi-administrative roles with minimal support, they may quickly shift from reflective to reactive practitioners.

From an organizational learning lens, the same conditions can make it hard for teacher teams to learn collectively when they have little time to engage in knowledge sharing, reflection on practice or experimentation with innovations. It creates a conflict between collaborative leadership and the fragmented, overworked reality of tasks.

Q2P1: "limited resources... tight budget... no internet... shared decision-making complexities... balancing teaching with sustainability goals."

Q2P2: "multiple roles... collaborative decision-making... takes longer... building experience and confidence."

Q2P7: "limited teaching resources... overloaded teaching load... lack of professional development... time management difficulties."

Q2P10: "teaching subjects outside expertise... abrupt changes... scholarship system pressures passing students."

Q2P14: "limited teaching resources... workload and time management... inconsistent student readiness."

Philippine literature validates these resources and workload strains. (Felisilda et al., 2024) show that new teachers in Cagayan de Oro struggle with classroom control and finding their footing. Valencia Division studies link crushing workloads to burnout, even when teamwork helps some (*Collaboration Opportunities and Workload on Professional Development Access of Public-School Teachers - International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science (IJRIAS)*, 2024). Curriculum reforms under K-10 just pile on more time pressure (Daga et al., 2025).

Global studies mirror these patterns. South African research on entrepreneurial Education reveals teacher resource shortages and "time poverty" (Ntsanwisi & Simelane-Mnisi, 2025). A growing body of international syntheses shows that for novices, expectations are rising, but support and regular routines are not (Creagh et al., 2023).

Informed by teacher-development and organizational-learning theories, these findings indicate that, beyond the distribution of work in entrepreneurial cooperative schools, simply handing off tasks to novices, deliberate structures must be designed, namely mentoring, protected planning time, and shared data reviews to help novices progress from survival to competence while transforming day-to-day issues into collective learning.

Benefits Gained in Entrepreneurial Cooperative Schools

Theme: Enhanced Skills and Tougher Mindset

This theme captures how novice teachers developed real strengths through their experience. They became more flexible, worked better as a team, stepped up to lead, grew more resourceful and resilient, and started thinking like startup-oriented professionals. These changes emerged from juggling a wide mix of roles and tight community bonds, which built grit and a sense of purpose even when the going got rough.

From a teacher development perspective, this moves novices along the continuum from survival toward competence and beginner autonomy. Exposure to multiple responsibilities, decision-making, and entrepreneurial tasks accelerates their "adaptive expertise," enabling them not only to deliver planned lessons but also to improvise and innovate under constraints.

Turning everyday learning moments into shared learning is one of those incidental things that can be extremely valuable to the school from an organizational-learning perspective when delivered by teachers. Their

resourcefulness, their problem-solving, and their leadership on small projects become tacit knowledge that can be mentored and systematized; a vital part of building the institution to adapt and innovate.

Q3P1: "Develop a strong sense of decision making, problem solving, being innovative, resourceful, and flexible."

Q3P2: "professional growth and confidence... stronger collaboration skills... connect more deeply with community."

Q3P7: "strong sense of collaboration... practical leadership... entrepreneurial mindset... professional growth and flexibility."

Q3P10: "a lot of experience... more flexible and adaptable... grow professionally."

Q3P14: "strong sense of teamwork... professional growth... leadership, communication, problem-solving, entrepreneurial skills."

Local studies validate these skill-building benefits. Mindanao cooperative-school research shows how hands-on business exposure builds real versatility in teachers (*Experiences of School Leaders in Managing Entrepreneurial Behavior of Teachers: A Case Study - International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2024) Private-school narratives link challenges to professional growth (*Exploring the Early Years: Stories and Narratives of Novice Teachers in Private Schools - International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2023). Pre-service TLE studies affirm entrepreneurial competencies (Aaron & Tumbali, 2019).

International evidence supports this trajectory. The international teacher-training literature has sought to foster a proactive, entrepreneurial mindset through real-world tasks (*Fostering Entrepreneurial Mindsets in Teacher Trainees: A Study on Entrepreneurship Education for Future Educators, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 2025). In fact, U.S. studies of new teachers show that wearing multiple hats promotes flexibility and resilience (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Viewed through the lens of teacher development and organizational learning theories, these findings suggest that entrepreneurial cooperative schools can serve as "incubators" where novice teachers rapidly develop both professional expertise and a learning-oriented mindset that benefits the whole organization.

Advice for Novice Teachers

Theme: Adaptive Flexibility, Teamwork, and Making Do.

This theme develops the participants' practical guidance: expect multiple hats, prioritize colleagues and open communication, practice proactive time management, embrace the virtue of patience in a resource-strapped environment, and finally treat chaos as an opportunity for upgrade. Or, this analysis characterizes these suggestions as strategies for proactively surviving and thriving in context-rich, resource-sparse cooperative environments.

From a teacher development perspective, this advice aligns with the conditions that support early-career teachers' growth: clear expectations, emotional support, and opportunities to reflect on practice. They are implicitly encouraged to transcend "the bare minimum" and instead view their roles as opportunities for reflection, experimentation and feedback-seeking.

From an organizational learning perspective, the focus on teamwork, collaboration and mentoring mirrors the characteristics of schools that support shared inquiry and distributed leadership. A school that encourages teachers to rely on their department and trade ideas implicitly fosters a culture of shared learning rather than just personal growth.

Q4P1: “prepared in wearing different hats... strengthen collaboration and communication... be resourceful and innovative.”

Q4P5: “be flexible and open... practice collaboration... be patient and commitment.

Q4P7: “prepared for multiple responsibilities... develop strong classroom management... manage expectations.”

Q4P10: "Be flexible... strengthen time management and patience... take as a learning opportunity."

Q4P14: “open to multiple roles... strong collaboration... time management.”

Philippine research aligns with this adaptive advice. Research on the work of newly hired teachers emphasizes maintaining flexibility and landing a good mentor as they get settled. Preparing hard and leaning on the team from day one are practices that veteran cooperating teachers emphasized (Cañete & Pantojan, 2025).

Worldwide, similar guidance emerges. South African entrepreneurial education teachers advise on resource innovation in lean settings (Ntsanwisi & Simelane-Mnisi, 2025). Australian intensification research promotes time-management and prioritization strategies for teachers under pressure (Creagh et al., 2023).

Grounded in teacher development and organizational learning theories, this advice suggests that for novice teachers in entrepreneurial cooperative schools, success is less about "doing everything alone" and more about embedding themselves in a learning community that supports adaptive growth, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement.

CONCLUSION

Though the competitive environment of private schools generally makes it difficult for novice teachers to find true teamwork and mentorship committed to a common goal, they are attracted instead to entrepreneurial cooperative schools.

They are, however, often faced with formidable challenges such as insufficient funding, overwhelming administrative tasks, and other pressures that make classroom management and sustainability difficult.

While not always easy, it was through these challenges that educators learned crucial resilience, leadership and adaptation skills, launching small-scale projects, working productively with limited resources and making sound commercial judgments.

Their candid advice highlights the need for agility, creativity in communication, and planning, showing that what at first may seem debilitating systemic challenges can become sources of fortitude at the personal and professional levels.

In the end, while these schools offer a supportive haven for novices, the study concludes that systemic changes, such as workload management and reallocation of resources to cover personal costs, are needed to keep teachers on staff for years at a time.

RECOMMENDATION

School leaders and co-op admins need to set up structured mentorship that pairs new teachers with experienced mentors who can help juggle tasks and build confidence in decision-making in these business-like setups.

DepEd and policymakers should push for basic infrastructure, including internet access in classrooms; stock up on supplies; fix the facilities; and cap workloads so no one drowns under packed schedules, or expedite the hiring process to fill all positions.

Hands-on workshops would help too. Time-management strategies, ways to handle kids on scholarship rules, and skills to keep the school running like a smart small business while still focusing on teaching.

New teachers starting should dive in flexible, team up early, make the most of available resources, and treat barriers like chances to get creative and grow tougher.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all who became part of this research journey.

First and foremost, to God whose grace, favor and provision have carried me throughout this scholarly pursuit.

I am also grateful to Dr. James Paglinawan for his insightful suggestions, which significantly improved the quality of my research, and for imparting his new knowledge in every way possible.

I would like to acknowledge the help, love and support of my family, which motivated me to continue and persevere even through the most difficult times of this journey.

Last but not least, to my classmates and colleagues who assisted and provided their full cooperation in the collection and discussion of data.

It would not be possible without all of you. Thank you so much, and to God be the Glory!

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