

Challenges and Recommendations to Champion Breastfeeding Teachers in Albay

Christine Grace M. Azul, University of Santo Tomas-Legazpi, Philippines

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Abstract

In today's modern world, it is equally significant for the mothers to nurse their babies and pursue their jobs. However, working mothers specifically teachers face initial challenges when they chose to breastfeed and return to work. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 10028 (2009) otherwise known as Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion was implemented to support breastfeeding employees through establishment of lactation area and the practice of 40-minute lactation period at work. However, not all workplace is implementing the law. This research was a mixed qualitative and quantitative type of study. A quantitative approach through a survey questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale assessed the challenges faced by the 15 mothers who continued breastfeeding their babies after their maternity leave in Albay. A qualitative approach deepened the understanding of these challenges to come up with proposed recommendations through open-response questions in the survey. Descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis were utilized to analyze the data. Two main challenges were identified in the workplace: lack of time (2.67) and lack of lactation area (2.93). Most breastfeeding teachers experienced inflexible working schedule and inaccessible lactation area in schools. Despite the challenges, they were supported by their co-teachers (4.33) and supervisors (3.67) by covering their duties and giving them constant moral support. The Department of Education (DepEd) with the help of school supervisors/principals must monitor the implementation of flexible work schedule, improvised lactation area, and inclusive guidelines in schools throughout Albay to fully create a supportive working environment for the breastfeeding teachers.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, Challenges, Philippines, Recommendations, Teachers

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Introduction

Decades of research prove that breastfeeding is best for babies up to two years of age. Breastfeeding for six months or longer create indisputable benefits both for the infant and mother (Lawrence, 2022). Thus, it is important for the mother to give the best source of food to her baby through breastfeeding. It is equally significant for the mothers though to nurse their babies and pursue their jobs. According to Whipps & Honoroff (2019), maternal return to employment outside the home shortly after birth is inevitable for some families. Although the benefits of breastfeeding are strong, most mothers are unable to continue breastfeeding upon returning from maternity leave due to different challenges at work (Harrington, et al., 2022).

Benefits of Breastfeeding

There are long-term benefits of breastfeeding both for the mother and the child. Primarily, it is the first preventive health measure that can be given to a child at birth because breastmilk contains all the essential nutrients suitable for the infant's needs (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010). It also has nutrients and enzymes that could fight infection at an early age so researchers have repeatedly demonstrated the recommendation of breastfeeding over formula feeding in most cases (Lena, 2018). Its health benefits to the infant such as lower risk of gastroenteritis, diarrheal illnesses, urinary tract infections (UTIs), sepsis, and respiratory infections are always underscored (Al-Katufi et al., 2020). Hence, it is an important public health strategy for improving infant and child morbidity and mortality (Al-Binali, 2012). Furthermore, UNICEF Philippines (2017) stated that breastfeeding mothers have lower rates of breast and ovarian cancer, two leading causes of death among women.

Breastfeeding has been widely researched to bring forth more advantages beyond the health benefits. The skin-to-skin closeness that occurs during breastfeeding promotes bonding and attachment between mother and infant as well which led to increased efficiency of breastfeeding and enhanced neurological and psychosocial development of the infant (Bettinelli, 2012). It also boosts the morale of mothers because breast-fed babies are inclined to be more healthy or immune from sickness (Department of Labor and Employment [DOLE], 2014). Lastly, it alleviates poverty, promotes economic growth, and ends inequalities globally (UNICEF Philippines, 2017). Despite the notable benefits of breastfeeding, it continues to be a tough challenge for working mothers.

Breastfeeding Challenges at Work

A working mother face initial challenges when she chose to breastfeed and work full-time. Bettinelli (2012) stated that return to work is a well-known recognized factor that has been associated with diminished breastfeeding frequency and duration. Given the increasing number of women in the workforce, the workplace is a fundamental setting of intervention to support women who face challenges such as early cessation of breastfeeding once they return to work (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

Indeed, some of the mothers are conflicted with their roles as a mother and as a member of the labor force. Lawrence (2022) stated that it is undeniably difficult to give up equally significant roles at home and at work. However, working creates difficulties and presents challenges in continuing breastfeeding. One of these challenges is that they mistakenly think they cannot breastfeed if they plan to return to work, and thus they may not talk with their

employers about their intention to breastfeed or how breastfeeding might be supported at their workplace (Bettinelli, 2012). In addition, few workplace environments are supportive of breastfeeding employees and employer perspectives toward breastfeeding remain discouraging (Stewart-Glenn, 2012). Even with the presence of lactation rooms, there were reported problems of their availability and accessibility to teachers and poor quality (Hentges & Pilot, 2021). Harrington, et al., (2022) added that lack of time, lack of space, and unsupportive work culture remain as challenges at work of breastfeeding employees.

In a study conducted by Al-Binali (2012), adverse work-related issues were one of the main reasons for a very low rate of exclusive breastfeeding among female school teachers in Saudi Arabia. Seeing that teachers can be found in the classroom most of the time at work and may have additional duties beyond the class hours, a breastfeeding teacher may find it more challenging to schedule pumping/nursing breaks. Based on Hentges & Pilot (2021) study, many teachers reported difficulties in creating time for breastfeeding where fixed schedules overlapped with lactation breaks. Thus, Philipps (2020) added that workplace climate in schools can be unfavorable for the demands of breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding Support for Teachers

Breastfeeding mothers in the academic field specifically teachers face various challenges at work. For mothers who choose to return to work postpartum, there are alternative options to breastfeeding such as pumping/expressing milk or breastfeeding the infant during breaks (Phillips, 2020). Way back 2009, this was highly supported by the passing of the Republic Act No. 10028 (2009) otherwise known as Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act. It stated that one way to support the exclusive breastfeeding movement in the workplace is to have a lactation room for breast pumping and milk storage. Establishment of lactation stations equipped with facilities for hand-washing and refrigeration and with electrical outlet and comfortable seat is required in non-health institutions (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010). With this initiative, literature shows that working mothers who have access to lactation facilities tend to be more productive as they feel less guilty of working full-time while providing one of the essential needs of their babies (Department of Labor and Employment [DOLE], 2014). This kind of intervention in the workplace is important in protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding among working mothers (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

A lactation period not less than 40 minutes in addition to the regular time-off for meals to breastfeed or express milk is also practiced in the Philippines (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010). Being the first law to provide paid breastfeeding breaks, its implementation should be closely monitored in the workplace throughout the country (World Health Organization, [WHO], 2015). This measure gives the breastfeeding mothers ample time to express milk in the workplace without worrying about their work schedule. An initiative like this which prioritizes the practical merging of breastfeeding and work is essential in optimizing the benefits of breastfeeding and supporting the employee (Lawrence, 2022). In addition, providing time for expressing milk in the workplace improved job satisfaction of employees (Jantzer et., al. 2018). Through these adequate policies, the right of women to combine motherhood and professional development would be fulfilled (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

In combination with the implementation of sound policies, the sincere support of the co-workers could also impact the breastfeeding success of working mothers. According to Vilar-

Compte et., al. (2021), feeling comfortable and supported in breastfeeding or breast pumping in the workplace is essential in achieving successful breastfeeding goals at work. Indeed, the presence of a lactation room, implementation of lactation breaks, co-workers' support, and adoption of policies in the workplace all play a vital role to champion breastfeeding teachers.

Being a breastfeeding teacher myself, this research has a special place in my heart. The outcome of this study will be significantly beneficial to champion the essential role of women especially mothers as the primary source of nutrition of their babies. It will also empower mothers to do their best amidst balancing roles as a parent and a professional. Lastly, it will encourage the government and private sectors to support the advocacy of breastfeeding and/or breast pumping in the workplace. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to discuss the breastfeeding challenges and find possible recommendations to support teachers in Albay achieve their breastfeeding goals. Specifically, it aimed to:

- a. Identify the breastfeeding challenges of teachers
- b. Determine ways to support breastfeeding teachers
- c. Propose possible recommendations to address the challenges and support breastfeeding teachers

Methodology

This research was a mixed qualitative and quantitative type of study. The same research methodology was done in Stewart-Glenn (2012) and Phillips (2020) studies. A quantitative approach through a survey questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale assessed the challenges faced by the participants. A qualitative approach deepened the understanding of these challenges to come up with proposed recommendations through open-response questions in the survey. Descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis were utilized to analyze the data.

Research Participants

The target participants were 15 mothers (Phillips, 2020; Hentges & Pilot, 2021) who continued breastfeeding their babies after their maternity leave. Given that the field of education is predominantly dominated by women, mothers who were working as full-time teachers with one child below the age of two (2) years were the chosen participants of this study.

Research Locale

The participants came from private and public schools in Albay. Given its strategic location in the Bicol Region as the gateway and urban province, most mothers here are expected to be involved in the workforce such as the academic field.

Research Instrument

Building upon the literature, the survey questionnaire was divided into two parts: a five-point Likert scale consisted of 10 questions and an open-ended section composed of three (3) questions. The questions in the first part were categorized into four themes: a) employee's perception as a breastfeeding mother b) employee's experiences in the workplace specifically work schedule and pumping area station c) employee's experiences with co-teachers' support; and d) employee's experiences with school head's support. In the second part, the questions

required a deeper explanation on the challenges and support that the participants had experienced in the workplace. The questions were adapted yet modified from Phillips (2020) study. Thus, a letter was sent to the author about the adaptation of the research instrument.

Data Gathering Procedure

The search for 15 target participants took a month last March 2023. They were selected through purposive sampling given that they were a unique sample as mothers who were in the minority of having experienced breastfeeding while working full time. A snowballing technique was also implemented as other eligible participants who might be interested in the study were recommended by initial participants. A consent form and initial conversation to build rapport with the participants was done first before the survey was distributed using email and/or Facebook. A short orientation about the objectives of the research and the data gathering procedure was also accomplished. The accomplished self-administered survey was collected and compiled in a span of one month.

Data Analysis

In the first part of the survey, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data from the Likert scale (see interpretations below). On the second part of the survey, content analysis was used to analyze the open-ended responses (Hentges & Pilot, 2021).

Mean	Verbal Interpretation
4.20-5.00	Fully Agree
3.40-4.19	Agree
2.60-3.39	Neutral
1.80-2.59	Disagree
1.00-1.79	Fully Disagree

Results and Discussion

Fifteen breastfeeding teachers with diverse teaching experiences from two (2) cities (Legazpi and Tabaco) and one (1) town (Daraga) of Albay province participated in the study. On average, mothers were 32 years old and most of them were Junior High School teachers.

Breastfeeding Perceptions

Theme	Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Perceptions as a mother and teacher	I am certain there is a place I could go to breastfeed or express breastmilk at work.	3.06	Neutral
	I am comfortable asking for help while breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk at work.	3.67	Agree
	I can talk about breastfeeding or expressing breastmilk at work.	4.2	Fully Agree

Table 1: Perceptions of Breastfeeding Teachers

Table 1 shows that the participants perceive their workplace as a secure and welcoming space for breastfeeding. They can openly share their thoughts and experiences in their breastfeeding journey at work with a mean rating of 4.2 and verbal interpretation of “Fully Agree.”

However, they are not that certain if there is a proper place for breastfeeding or breast pumping at work. This finding concurred with the study of Harrington, et al. (2022) that lack of specific space for breastfeeding employees remains as one of the tough challenges at work.

Breastfeeding at Work

Theme	Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Work Schedule and Pumping Area	My breaks are long and frequent enough to breastfeed or express breastmilk.	2.67	Neutral
	My breastfeeding or pumping area includes everything I need.	2.73	Neutral
	My breastfeeding or pumping area is in a private location and free of interruptions.	2.93	Neutral

Table 2: Breastfeeding Schedule and Area

In Table 2, most of the participants view their breaks at work as neither enough or insufficient to breastfeed or pump breastmilk with a mean rating of 2.67. Despite the demands of work, alternative options to breastfeeding such as pumping/expressing milk or breastfeeding the infant during breaks (Phillips, 2020) is still possible. Then again, many teachers in the study reported difficulties in creating time for breastfeeding where fixed schedules overlapped with lactation breaks (Hentges & Pilot, 2021).

Even with the initiative of Department of Education (DepEd) to release a memorandum in 2010 concerning the establishment of lactation rooms in the workplace, this stays as a major concern in schools throughout Albay. Many of the participants considered this as a major challenge at work with mean ratings of 2.73 and 2.93. Thus, all indicators regarding work schedule and lactation area in the workplace got a “Neutral” response which proves that this is one of the toughest challenges in their breastfeeding goals.

Breastfeeding Support

Theme	Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Support from Co-teachers	My co-teachers support my breastfeeding goals.	4.33	Fully Agree
	My co-teachers cover my job duties if I need time to breastfeed or express breastmilk.	3.47	Agree

Table 3: Breastfeeding Support from Co-teachers

In terms of support from co-teachers in Table 3, the study garnered the highest mean rating of 4.33 with a verbal interpretation of “Fully Agree.” Indeed, feeling comfortable and supported in breastfeeding or breast pumping in the workplace is essential in achieving successful breastfeeding goals at work (Vilar-Compte et., al., 2021). When it comes to their co-teachers covering their duties when they needed to breastfeed or pump, the mean rating was 3.47 which was a bit lower than the previous indicator mentioned above. It is noteworthy that workplace climate in schools can be unfavorable for the demands of breastfeeding (Phillips, 2020) even with the support of your colleagues.

Theme	Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Support from Supervisors	My supervisor supports my breastfeeding goals.	3.67	Agree
	My supervisor helps me manage my workload so I could breastfeed or express breastmilk.	3.27	Neutral

Table 4: Breastfeeding Support from Supervisor

In addition, the participants received adequate support from their supervisors with a mean rating of 3.67 as shown in Table 4. But the help they get to manage their workloads was a bit lower at 3.27 mean rating. With manageable and/or flexible workload, they will have ample time for expressing milk in the workplace which will lead to improved job satisfaction (Jantzer et., al. 2018).

Indicator	Main Theme	Subtheme
What was the toughest challenge that you have experienced as a breastfeeding mom in your school?	Work Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule • Lactation Area
What was the biggest support that you have received while breastfeeding or expressing breast milk in school?	Work Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral Support • Covering Duties
Can you name and describe polices related to breastfeeding or breast pumping that have been adopted by your school?	Work Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to Lactation Area • Lack of Policies

Table 5: Summary of Themes

The findings of the study identified themes and subthemes as illustrated in Table 5: (1) Work Challenges (2) Social Support (3) School Policies. These themes were applied to structure the findings and deepen the understanding on the challenges experienced by the participants and the support and policies they needed to help them succeed in their breastfeeding goals.

Work Challenges

Schedule

As teachers, these mothers faced unpleasant work-related issues such as a demanding work schedule which is one of the main reasons for a very low rate of exclusive breastfeeding (Al-Binali, 2012). Six (6) participants revealed their difficulty to breastfeed or pump milk during working hours. They cannot schedule breast pumping in between classes due to a lot of reasons such as handling preschoolers which require close attention, limited time during breaks, and doing paper works even after teaching in classrooms. One of them explained: “The toughest challenge I have experienced so far was my work time and schedule. There are times when I really need to breastfeed or express breast milk but I was not able to do it because I am still at work and should be with my pupils.” This is also in consonance with Hentges and Pilot (2021) study wherein participants reduced the frequency, postponed, and skipped pumping sessions due to time issues. Clearly, a lactation period not less than 40 minutes in addition to the regular time-off for meals to breastfeed or express milk which

should be practiced in the Philippines (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010) was not properly exercised by the participants.

Lactation Area

Lactation facilities such as a designated area at work impact the mothers' ability to continue breastfeeding (Hentges & Pilot, 2021). Five (5) participants shared that there was no breastfeeding/pumping area in the workplace. According to them, finding a private and comfortable place to breastfeed was a huge challenge because there was no specific place for breastfeeding moms. The rooms available were inappropriate and have no privacy for students who usually needed consistent attention. One of the participants highlighted: "One of the challenges that I experienced as a breastfeeding mom is finding a private and comfortable place to breastfeed." This only demonstrates that the memorandum from DepEd, which mandates the establishment of lactation stations equipped with facilities for hand-washing and refrigeration and with electrical outlet and comfortable seat was not fully realized in most schools in Albay (Department of Education [DepEd], 2010). This challenge should be seriously addressed because this is also considered as the top intervention to support breastfeeding women in the workplace based on Vilar-Compte et., al. (2021) study.

Work Support

Moral Support

Most of the participants felt supported and secure in their workplace. Thus, a school can be considered as one of the few workplace environments that are supportive of breastfeeding employees (Stewart-Glenn, 2012). Six (6) mothers disclosed that their co-teachers are encouraging them to continue breastfeeding which made them felt good about themselves emotionally and mentally. In the words of one of the participants: "The biggest support I have received was moral support from my other colleagues who can fully understand my situation as a breastfeeding mom and that means a lot." This is similar with the results found in Philipps (2020) study where the participants responded favorably regarding overall co-worker support. They also received tips on how to increase their milk supply and reminders to pump on time and remain positive about being a breastfeeding mother. Hence, a workplace is certainly a fundamental setting of intervention to support women who face challenges such as early cessation of breastfeeding once they return to work (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

Covering Duties

Apart from moral support, five (5) participants discussed positively how their co-teachers cover their duties whenever they are breastfeeding or breast pumping. One of them stated: "The biggest support that I have received while breastfeeding is the support from my co-teachers and principal. They attend to my class while I am breastfeeding." Their colleagues and even the principal is willing to attend to their class and give them consideration when they needed more time to complete their work while they are breastfeeding. One of the mothers also appreciated the gesture of letting her extend her breaks while she pumps milk and they attend to her class. This finding contradicts the study of Al-Katufi et al., (2020) which demonstrated deficient work support from colleagues as one of the top barriers in pursuing breastfeeding in the workplace. This might be a case of differences between two work cultures in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Work Policies

Accessibility to Lactation Area

Despite the lack of appropriate lactation area in the school, three (3) of the participants noted the initiative of their workplace to allow them to breast pump in the Faculty Room privately and in a designated small room. One of them added that she also had a flexible schedule and can go home early to breastfeed her child: “As to policies, there are none. The school pays consideration, however, to breastfeeding moms since they allow their employees to pump at faculty rooms and go home earlier (if work is done) to breastfeed their babies at home.” This shows that some schools make use of the limited and available facilities to support the breastfeeding teachers. This initiative which prioritizes the practical merging of breastfeeding and work is essential in optimizing the benefits of breastfeeding and supporting the employee (Lawrence, 2022).

Lack of Policies

However, 11 out of 15 participants noted the lack of any policy in school supporting breastfeeding teachers. One of them narrated: “I guess there is no policy related to breastfeeding or breast pumping that has been adopted by our school. This kind of situation should be addressed and I guess everyone should be aware of the struggles of some breastfeeding moms that are working as public school teachers and weren’t able to breastfeed and do milk pumping due to our work.” Indeed, without the appropriate policies in place, the right of women to combine motherhood and professional development would not be fulfilled (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

Conclusion

This research identified the practices that hinder breastfeeding of teachers after returning to work. The participants have had trouble breastfeeding/breast pumping at work due to two (2) major challenges: a) lack of time and b) lack of lactation area. In the middle of these challenges, they also received enough support in the workplace from their co-teachers and supervisors. With this, the following are the recommendations to overcome these challenges and support breastfeeding teachers in Albay:

A. Flexible Work Schedule

Looking at the challenges of the participants, their work schedule remains as the top barrier to achieve their breastfeeding goals. It is recommended that the teachers should be well-informed about the Republic Act No. 10028 (2009) otherwise known as Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act which grants nursing employees paid break intervals not less than 40 minutes for every (8)-hour working period. Being mindful of this act would allow them to properly plan their work schedule and breastfeeding sessions. Though this is the first law to provide paid breastfeeding breaks, not all workplaces are implementing this law (World Health Organization, [WHO], 2015). Thus, it is important both for the teacher and supervisor/principal to be aware of this so proper guideline will be practiced in the workplace regarding breastfeeding employees.

One of the participants cited a flexible schedule granted to her as a breastfeeding mother. While this might be challenging for the supervisor, it is still feasible. For instance, a lunch

break can be extended to practice the 40-minute paid break or early out (after accomplishing the duties at work) can be implemented. Through this intervention in work schedule, protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding among working mothers will be achievable (Vilar-Compte et., al. 2021).

B. Improvised Lactation Area

Another notable challenge is the establishment of proper lactation area in schools. Even with the presence of lactation rooms, there were reported problems of their availability and accessibility to teachers and poor quality (Hentges & Pilot, 2021).

Looking at the reality of education facilities in the Philippines, it is recommended to establish makeshift lactation area in schools. It is important to observe safety, cleanliness, and privacy in the designated area to ensure the good quality if not the ideal characteristic of a lactation area. With this initiative, literature shows that working mothers who have access to lactation facilities tend to be more productive as they feel less guilty of working full-time while providing one of the essential needs of their babies (Department of Labor and Employment [DOLE], 2014).

C. Inclusive School Guideline

As breastfeeding teachers, these mothers have the right to be provided with support and resources to perform their utmost duty as a mother and an educator. Given their responsibilities, it is unquestionably difficult to give up equally significant roles at home and at work (Lawrence, 2022). Through an inclusive school guideline, the co-teachers and supervisor/principal will work hand in hand to cater to the unique needs (such as lactation break and lactation area) of the breastfeeding teacher/s. As a result, the mother would feel included and valued at work and would see the school as a supportive working environment in her breastfeeding journey.

These critical needs of the mothers must be met and normalized so that the breastfeeding support for teachers will be institutionalized at the physical and organizational level (Hentges & Pilot, 2021). Amidst the difficulties, the Bicolano participants were supported by their colleagues which made things a lot easier for them to continue their breastfeeding goals. With this solid support and love, it is possible to establish proper guidelines in schools (both public and private) in Albay to champion breastfeeding teachers.

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Contact email: christinegrace.azul@ust-legazpi.edu.ph