



CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS IN THE CAREER TRANSITIONS OF EDUCATION GRADUATES AS CALL CENTER AGENTS

SONIA V. ANDRINO

Team Leader

TELUS Digital Iloilo

andrinosonia74@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was undertaken to investigate the experiences of education graduates employed as call center agents at Telus Digital in Mandurriao, Iloilo City. The study employs comprehensive interviews with ten participants to ascertain the primary challenges encountered during their transition from the education sector to the BPO industry. The qualitative data gathered underwent thematic analysis. . Most participants were in their late twenties, with equal gender representation and backgrounds in secondary education, specializing in MAPEH and English. Major challenges encountered included sleep disruption, dealing with difficult customers, managing high stress levels, meeting performance metrics, and identity adjustment. To cope, participants relied on emotional regulation and professional detachment, structured self-management and discipline, continuous learning and skill enhancement, and seeking and utilizing social support.

Keywords: *Challenges, Coping Mechanisms, Career Transition, Education Graduates, Call Center Agents*

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INTRODUCTION

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) is when you get procedures from other companies or service providers (Lacity et al., 2011). Outsourcing is a business technique that companies use when they want an outside company to do a certain job or need (Du & Miao, 2022). The BPO market is expected to develop at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.5% from 2023 to 2030. In 2022, it made about \$245.9 billion in sales (Pangarkar, 2025). It is quickly gaining traction in many fields and sectors, providing a wide range of services, including financial, customer support, and telecommunications, to name a few (Grand View Research, 2022).

The Asia Pacific region is one of the world's biggest BPO markets, and it is expected to grow at a stable rate of 9.5% per year from 2021 to 2026. India, China, and the Philippines are the top three BPO service providers in the area (Pangarkar, 2025). The Philippines is seen as the BPO capital of Southern Asia (Du & Miao, 2022), and it hires outside service providers to do important corporate tasks (Candelario et al., 2024). About a thousand BPO companies hired about 1.3 million Filipinos in 2019, which was about 8–10% of the annual rise. So, it's one of the fastest-growing industries in the country, making up 10–15% of the worldwide BPO industry and helping the economy thrive (Dino, 2022; Ramotowski, 2025).

Mandurriao is the current economic center of Iloilo City, which is the capital of Iloilo province in the Philippines. This is because trade and commerce are always growing, and there are many businesses and industries there, such as hotels, parks, malls, offices, and BPO

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companies (Iloilo Provincial Government, 2021; Sornito, 2021). Telus Digital (previously Telus

International) is an example of a BPO company.

In the Philippines, job mismatch is common. A person may carry out jobs and responsibilities that are unrelated to their college program or course (Palabrica, 2024). Also, high-paying jobs are important (Orillaza, 2014, as referenced in Castro et al., 2015). The BPO business is open and hiring people with different levels of education and abilities, however these people often don't have the skills or education needed for the work (Castro et al., 2015). Career transition is the process of switching jobs across companies, occupations, or career areas (De Vos et al., 2021).

The BPO sector offers a variety of incentives, including a competitive wage, benefits, early promotion, and signing bonuses (CNCTC, 2023). So, there is a clear tendency toward moving to BPO jobs (Ricasata, 2025). Many people who graduate from college and want to teach put their careers on hold to work in occupations that pay more than the minimum wage (Esteron, 2025).

However, obstacles remain after the change, such as managing time well and keeping mental health (Cordero et al., 2023). Coping methods are crucial for adaptation and adjustment in a new work environment, especially in managing stressful situations (Algorani & Gupta, 2023).

The research would enhance our understanding of the challenges faced by education graduates employed in the call center industry, specifically at Telus Digital in Iloilo, during the 2025-2026 academic year, as well as the coping mechanisms they employ during their career

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transitions that may assist in addressing these challenges. The results may help schools, policymaker, and BPO firms establish support systems, career advice, and workplace changes that improve employee health and help them make smart career choices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology and procedures utilized in conducting the study. It encompasses various aspects, including the research method used, research design, selection of participants and study locale, description and validity of research instruments, procedures for data collection, and methods for the study's data analysis.

Research Method

This study utilized a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews, which seeks to understand phenomena through the gathering of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and texts. This method is well suited for assessing the experiences, meanings, and viewpoints of participants in their natural social settings and for manipulating human as well as social issues. It attempts to grasp the relevance of such lived experiences by highlighting often overlooked or assumed aspects (Mcleod, 2024).

Research Design

The researchers employed a descriptive research design to study the management practices of Iloilo City education graduates as they began working in the call center sector, which, for Singh (2024), is mostly focused on describing the features of an entity, group, or

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phenomenon being studied. Instead of tampering with variables, the method enables the researchers to observe closely, describe accurately, and record as they exist naturally. It is a useful starting point for investigating matters in depth, as it makes possible the systematic gathering of information that brings out patterns, relationships, and trends in the subject. For this research, the descriptive approach permitted the researchers to observe and record the real experiences of graduates, how they prepared themselves for the transition, adjusting to the challenges of a new work environment, and how they employed different strategies to cope with challenges.

This design also enabled the researchers to identify patterns and similarities in their methods, providing valuable insights into the most commonly used or effective approaches. It also highlighted the contextual elements that influenced these changes, including the availability of training opportunities, the Iloilo City market's condition, family engagement, and individual goals. The researchers were able to get a broad overview of the phenomenon they were studying because of this arrangement. This research design does not only provide rich and informative reports of the problem but also assists in naming factors that might affect or account for some behaviors and conditions.

Participants of the Study

In this research, attention focused on a specific subset of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) agents, those with a degree in education, at least two years of experience working for any BPO company, and currently working at Telus Digital.

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A total of ten (10) participants were selected, as a small sample will be sufficient to explore the research topics in depth.

Sampling Design

Researchers who are well-informed about the topic of study and the population they wish to examine should employ purposeful sampling effectively. Through this knowledge, they are able to select participants whose meaningful, contextual information would contribute to rich and deep findings. If used deliberately, purposive sampling is capable of producing an extremely representative sample of the target population, not statistically, perhaps, but experientially and thematically.

Research Instrument

The researchers developed a self-constructed, open-ended interview schedule. This research aims to identify the challenges encountered and coping mechanisms of education graduates during their career transitions to the call center industry, specifically at Telus Digital in Strata, Iloilo City. Additionally, the interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher. The participants were asked beforehand if the interview sessions could be recorded. A voice recorder from the researcher's smartphone was utilized to record the session.

The interview schedule is divided into two (2) sections, comprising a total of two (2) questions. The first part is about the participant's socio-demographic profile. The second part is focused on the reasons for the participants' career transitions. The final section of the

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questionnaire focuses on the challenges that the participants faced during their careers, given that they are graduates in education.

Validity of the Research Instrument

A self-developed interview schedule was tailored to meet the specific objectives of the study. The initial draft was submitted to a panel of professionals, including the researcher's academic advisor, for review and evaluation to ensure its relevance and clarity. This expert validation process would serve as a critical step in establishing content validity, which refers to the extent to which the items in the instrument comprehensively represent the construct being measured (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

The adviser's recommendations would assist the researchers in finalizing the interview schedule. These suggestions would enhance the questionnaire's structure, clarity, and relevance, ensuring that each item aligns with the research objectives and elicits meaningful responses. After incorporating the initial feedback, the revised version was resubmitted for a second round of validation. This iterative process would strengthen the instrument's face validity, which refers to how appropriate and understandable the tool appears to participants. The survey's overall quality and effectiveness were greatly improved by getting experts involved and going through the instrument several times (Repke et al., 2024).

Subject-matter expert involvement would play a crucial role in enhancing the credibility of the research instrument and increasing the likelihood of collecting reliable and meaningful data. Experts would help identify potential biases, ambiguous language, and irrelevant items, thereby preventing their inclusion and preserving the integrity of the findings. This validation

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process was essential in ensuring that the instrument is both accurate and contextually appropriate for the study's objectives (Kalkbrenner, 2021).

Before being sent to the chosen participants, the interview schedule was carefully looked over and tested. Only once the researchers are confident in its methodological integrity would it be administered. This thorough preparation would ensure that the instrument is not only valid but also capable of generating significant and credible insights.

Data Gathering Procedures

This study outlines a detailed data-gathering process that begins with obtaining the necessary permissions from relevant authorities, specifically the subject adviser, school administrators, and the management of the company where the BPO agents are employed, along with the pre-submission of a draft interview schedule for review.

Once approved, the interview schedule was conveyed to the participants, and researchers would make sure that the participants had given their informed permission after having explained to them the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, possible risks, benefits, and alternatives. As always, any individual privacy and confidentiality were maintained, and participation in the research was voluntary.

The interview schedule was conducted in person at time slots available to reduce distractions. Moreover, a voice recorder using the researcher's phone was utilized to document the interview session. Participants were given ample time to complete the interview schedule, and data obtained was counted, statistically processed, and interpreted with the help of a

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range of tools to establish conclusions. After obtaining data, researchers conducted thorough analysis and interpretation to obtain significant results for the study.

Data Analyses

This study used theme analysis to analyze qualitative data. This method was chosen for its success and versatility in finding patterns and themes in non-numerical data. Thematic analysis allows researchers to gain insights from participants' behaviors, expressions, and lived experiences, unlike statistical methods. Thematic analysis is still one of the most popular and adaptable methods for methodically evaluating qualitative data and finding recurring themes and meanings, according to Braun and Clarke (2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Specifically, this study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What challenges do education graduates face when transitioning to the call center industry, especially at Telus Digital in Mandurriao, Iloilo City?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of education graduates employed as call center agents?

The research method utilized in the study was descriptive using in-depth interview.

The study used phenomenology under qualitative research design.

The study participants were composed of 10 BPO agents holding a degree in education, a minimum of two years of experience in any BPO company, and currently employed at Telus Digital.

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The research instrument utilized in the study was a researcher-made interview schedule. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher. The participants were asked beforehand if the interview sessions could be recorded. A voice recorder from the researcher's smartphone was utilized to record the session.

A panel of experts validated the interview schedule and considered all comments and suggestions relative to the validation of the tool.

Permits from the individual participants were obtained to allow the researcher to conduct the study. The interview schedule was conducted in person at time slots available to reduce distractions.

Using in-depth interview, a voice recorder using the researcher's phone was utilized to document the interview session. Participants were given ample time to complete the interview schedule, and data obtained was counted, statistically processed, and interpreted with the help of a range of tools to establish conclusions.

The information gathered was analyzed using thematic analysis.

The following are the findings of the study:

Based on the results of the in-depth interview with the participants, it was found that the challenges encountered by education graduates after transitioning to the call center industry were primarily related to sleep disruption and physiological adjustment. Participants revealed that changing shifts, graveyard schedules, insufficient sleep, and irregular working hours affected their sleeping routine, body clock, and overall physical well-being.

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Based on the results of the in-depth interview with participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, and 10, it was found that one of the major challenges encountered after transitioning to the call center industry was sleep disruption and physiological adjustment. These participants revealed that changing shifts, graveyard schedules, insufficient sleep, and irregular working hours affected their sleeping routine, body clock, and physical well-being.

It was also found out from Participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 that emotional labor in handling difficult customers was another major challenge. They described dealing with irate, frustrated, narrow-minded, and verbally challenging customers as emotionally exhausting because they needed to remain calm, patient, and professional during customer interactions.

Participants 5, 6, and 9 revealed that performance pressure became a significant challenge after entering the BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) industry. According to them, maintaining key performance indicators (KPIs), passing scorecards, achieving customer satisfaction targets, and meeting company standards created stress and required constant focus and discipline.

Based on the interviews with participants 1, 2, 3, and 8, work-life balance was also identified as a challenge. They shared that unpredictable schedules, shifting day-offs, and work demands often limited their bonding time with family and friends, reduced participation in social activities, and required continuous lifestyle adjustment.

Participants 3, 6, and 9 also revealed that they experienced identity adjustment after transitioning from teaching to the call center industry. They described a sense of disconnection

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from their educational background because the work environment differed greatly from the teaching profession and required adaptation to a new professional identity.

Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10 managed these challenges through emotional regulation strategies. Based on their responses, they coped by controlling their emotions, avoiding taking customer reactions personally, maintaining patience, and staying professional even during stressful interactions.

As for self-care practices, Participants 1, 3, 6, 7, and 10 managed their adjustment through sleep discipline, healthy eating, hydration, rest, and self-time to maintain physical and mental well-being despite shifting schedules.

Participants 2, 4, 6, and 8 relied on social support systems such as family, friends, co-workers, and supervisors. Emotional encouragement, advice, and shared workplace experiences helped them cope with pressure and maintain motivation.

Likewise, Participants 3, 5, and 6 adjusted through continuous learning and skill development. They used coaching feedback, note-taking, training review, and practice to improve call handling, system navigation, and performance scores.

It was also revealed by Participants 1, 5, 7, and 9 that maintaining a positive mindset and engaging in personal reflection helped them sustain adjustment in the call center environment by viewing challenges as opportunities for growth, resilience, and professional improvement.

The findings provide several insights into the career migration of education graduates into the BPO sector:

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Transitioning into the call center industry presents a range of challenges, notably sleep disruption from irregular work schedules, which calls for disciplined self-management and healthy routines to maintain well-being and resilience. The role also demands strong emotional regulation and stress management skills to navigate difficult customer interactions and meet performance targets, with continuous learning and robust social support networks proving essential for confidence and success.

Adapting one's professional identity to fit the call center environment is crucial, and combining self-discipline, emotional intelligence, ongoing development, and supportive relationships enables individuals to thrive.

For sustainable career transitions, BPO companies must implement inclusive support systems, prioritize mental health, and provide mentorship and career guidance. Organizational backing, particularly in addressing sleep and identity challenges, ensures education graduates can overcome job mismatches and succeed in the global outsourcing sector, suggesting that there must be systemic, industry-wide interventions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the present study, the following suggestions were made:

Call center companies should offer flexible shift schedules, wellness programs on sleep hygiene, and rest areas to support employees' well-being. Regular training in emotional regulation, access to counseling, and peer support are vital for managing job stress. Fostering an open, supportive environment with clear communication, employee recognition, and

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realistic performance metrics helps boost morale and reduces burnout. Coaching should focus on growth and well-being, not just numbers.

Education graduates entering the BPO industry should seek mentorship and orientation, participate in team-building and peer support, and commit to continuous learning. Maintaining healthy routines, practicing emotional regulation, and building strong support networks will help them adapt, build resilience, and achieve career success.

Educational institutions should proactively prepare graduates for diverse career paths, including opportunities outside the traditional teaching profession, such as roles in the BPO industry. Incorporating courses on relevant skills like communication, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and modification to the curriculum could potentially help students make easy career changes.

Schools should provide career guidance and counseling on alternative career options and labor market trends. Internships, job fairs, and exposure trips with BPOs and other industries give students important real-world experience. Offering workshops on stress management, time management, and coping strategies builds resilience for demanding workplaces. Also, creating mentorship networks with alumni who have moved on to different fields can provide ongoing support, useful advice, and motivation. By implementing these initiatives, educational institutions equip graduates to confidently navigate career transitions and succeed in diverse professional environments.

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Future research should use larger, more diverse samples; consider mixed-methods or longitudinal designs; explore additional influencing factors; and collaborate with industry partners for more relevant, generalizable results.



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