

Struggles and Successes of Online Teaching: The Teachers' Lived Experience

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Abstract

The continuous transformation in education brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic includes teaching and learning online. There is a plethora of literature and studies on institutions immediate responses to the abrupt shift from face to face to online teaching and the current context of virtual education. However, to further understand the ground level of teachers' experiences, this study is conducted. Through Husserlian descriptive phenomenology, higher education teachers from different private and state universities were interviewed to clearly describe their experiences. Based on their narratives, it was found that there were different struggles and areas of successes in their online teaching experiences. The following emerged as themes (1) struggle in the use of technology, (2) struggle in online classroom management, (3) struggle on Internet connectivity, (4) increase in time management skills, (5) increase technological knowledge, (6) increase in flexibility.

Keywords— online teaching; teachers' experiences, phenomenology

I. INTRODUCTION

Every field and sector in society has been changed globally due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the field of education is no exception. To adapt to the changes, online education are offered and has become prevalent in all levels including the tertiary education (Allen & Seaman, 2003; Devran & Elitas, 2016, Kaban & Cakmak, 2016).

Pacheco (2020) described new normal in education as enforcing digitization in learning or suspending the physical set up of learning to synchronous and asynchronous forms where teacher-learning transactions were done online or via mobile messaging or calls- not in classrooms. Colleges and universities across the county have implemented distance education or online learning, e-learning, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning and massive open online courses (MOOCs). These emphasized Internet-based courses offered synchronously and asynchronously. Teachers and students are compelled to embrace the new digital academic experience.

Teachers play a pivotal role since they are the implementers of the new learning modality.

Thus, there is great need for them to prepare and align all instructional components to include not just the platform, time, content but also the materials, and the overall readiness – psychological and social factors. Teachers are also expected to have high levels of motivation and proper behavior since these significantly affect their teaching and the students' learning. Their tasks and responsibilities in and outside the classroom are not easily transferable; even before the pandemic and more so now with the new teaching and leaning modality, teachers are indispensable. Since the online teaching in a larger scale has never been implemented before, teachers grapple to overcome issues and challenges that beset teaching and learning. Additionally, this set up of pure online, where the work is not at home is something that teachers have to experience first hand for the first time. This requires a different set of training and preparation since the mode and structure are very different though the end goals are the same (Barbour & Unger, 2014).

It is in these premises that the researcher endeavored to understand by describing the conditions and experiences of teachers in their online teaching journey.

Philosophical Stance

This study examines and implicitly acknowledges different philosophical assumptions in terms of (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, (3) axiology, and (4) rhetoric.

Ontology

According to Creswell (2003), ontology is the claim, which researchers make regarding knowledge. To this end, the research scaffolding was designed with an ontological view that assumes the phenomenon being studied contributing to the best and effective way of handling online classes. Guba & Lincoln (1994) and Crotty's (1994) claim that knowledge is reality and is based on human practice and experience which are products of interaction. Additionally, building on their personal perceptions, they have the capacity to respond to the social environment. It significantly affects their future actions and interactions. Moreover, the ontological assumption would help emphasize the lived experiences of higher education teachers in the pure online teaching and learning situations. Questions on experiencing and understanding are navigated in the study.

Epistemology

In a more detailed explanation, discovering and describing the unusual context of those investigated is the aspiration of a constructivist approach to research (Briodo & Manning, 2002). Further, describing the teachers experiences based on their voices from narratives would lead to the intentionality of the design being epistemological in nature.

Axiology

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of higher education teachers on the online teaching in the new normal. With this, the researcher uses bracketing being a teacher herself.

Bracketing, according to Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) is an investigator's attempt to achieve the state of transcendental subjectivity and neutrality by putting aside prior understanding of preconceptions about the phenomenon under

investigation. Phenomenological reduction is an attempt to suspend the observer's viewpoint and hearing another person's reality and focusing on the central, dominant or recurring themes which represent the essential qualities or meaning of that person's experience. It is central to Husserl's approach; moreover, it is associated with the idea of bracketing. The researcher uses bracketing by memoing down her own thoughts and experiences about online teaching, being the phenomenon studied.

Rhetoric

Making sense of reality, describing and explaining human behavior is the focus of doing qualitative research (Barbour, 2008). In the same way, in-depth knowledge on the meaning of a particular aspect of experience is discovered and conveyed. Words and language are even viewed as the primary symbol system in arriving at the meaning of such experience especially that dialogues and reflections are reviewed.

Through the process of this phenomenological venture, the researcher strives for an accurate description of the data, such that the study would reveal what it mainly intends to reveal. The core of this research process is to look closely and describe the voice of the informants and to this effect, allow future undertakings to determine viability and transferability to other settings (Creswell, 1998).

Domain of Inquiry

This study describes the lived experiences of higher education teachers on online teaching. Consequently, emergent themes are derived from the teachers' experiences.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper used the qualitative narrative and descriptive method whose goal is to comprehensively describe and summarize the narratives of the teachers' experiences in their online teaching anchored on the tenets of Husserlian descriptive phenomenology whose philosophical underpinnings are that of the lived, human experience. The qualitative descriptive method drew emphasis from

naturalistic inquiry, which levels their experiences in its natural state (Lambert, 2012).

Research Participants and Environment

The informants are higher education teachers in Cebu, Philippines who are involved in online teaching during the pandemic. They are a combination of private and state university teachers.

Research Instruments

The researcher is the main instrument in this study because the results lie in her description and analyses. In achieving the objective of the inquiry, in-depth interview using a semi-structured format was used to extract the essential themes from the informants. The informants were asked open-ended questions in order to obtain further clarification and information (Fassinger in Alvarez, 2011).

Data Analysis

In analyzing the research data, the researcher used Collaizi's (1978) method in data analysis which covers extracting, organizing, and analyzing data from the conducted interviews. The seven steps of Collaizi's entails familiarization of research data through the interview transcripts, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings based on the identified significant statements, clustering of emergent themes from the formulated meanings or textual descriptions, and coming up with rich descriptions, fabricating the basic structure and verifying all these from the informants.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The unforeseen shift has created a close to unimaginable stress and burden on families as they face the role of their children having to learn using the digital media. Educational administrators and especially teachers find themselves in uncharted waters (Gentner 2020). The participants shared their experiences of struggles in the online teaching as well as redeeming factors, which are areas to celebrate. The following theme were extracted: (1) struggle in the use of technology, (2) struggle in managing classes, (3) struggles on Internet connectivity and noise, (4) increased time

management skills, (5) increased in technological knowledge and (6) increase flexibility in transitioning to blended learning.

1. Struggle in the use of technology

Although technology has been integrated finally in the field of education, Wadell (2015) asserted that there are still issues and challenges that need to be addressed when used for teaching and learning. Most of the participants stated that they are not experts when it comes to digital technology. They only usually use Microsoft word, PowerPoint and Excel but when it comes to applications and learning management systems, they admitted that they are neophytes.

"I am not very fond of using apps since I am not knowledgeable about it. So when the online teaching happened, I had trouble and I feel the stress when it comes to technology use." (P2)

Though technology has a positive impact to learners, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed (Chai et al., 2010; Shan Fu, 2013). It is natural for teachers to struggle most especially when the experience is new. Teachers feel like they have no choice but to embrace the situation abruptly. As mentioned,

"I was grappling to learn because I was not prepared." (P1)

"I never imagined that we can deliver instruction online though we heard it many times during trainings but now it's real." (P4)

2. Struggles in online classroom management

Managing the class is still very important even in the online set up. This was to ensure that competencies are delivered and objectives are met. Given the sudden shift, millions of teachers began the task of teaching using computers while at home. The event was disruptive and though inexperienced and unprepared, the education sector moved and shifted nevertheless (Bao, 2020).

As student engagement is essential, teachers find it very important to meet individual needs of every student and since management

includes engagement of students, and many teachers feel inadequate in terms of the skills in managing the online classroom.

“Nag struggle jud ko kai naay uban nga naa sa google meet but walay tingog-tingog” (P4) (I struggle since there are students who are in the Google classroom yet I have not heard them speak)

Additionally, monitoring students' behavior and checking their contribution and progress in an online environment is difficult for teachers since they are not used to the virtual learning environment. Moreover, students are not required to turn on their camera or video thus, teachers cannot be very sure of their presence and attention.

3. Struggles on Internet connectivity and Noise

Teachers expressed their dismay when Internet connection is intermittent worse is when they get disconnected. It is a fundamental necessity to have reliable digital device as well as good Wi-Fi connection for online teaching (Coman et al., 2020). The struggle to reconnect online also includes remembering the train of thought in the discussion. Thus the teaching momentum is challenged.

Another common challenge shared among the participants is the noise that is disruptive during online classes. These may come from chicken clucking or dogs barking and even neighbors who are tending their goods.

“I was really struggling during the first semester of the online implementation since the Internet connectivity at home was very bad.” (P3)

“There is also noise from sellers outside the house shouting “saging!” (banana) if we are interested to buy banana or fish.” (P2)

The Philippines has only two major player in the communication industry and government should take consideration knowing that these players become complacent when it comes to their service delivery. In the new normal,

Internet connectivity plays a very important role, not just in education but also in the many different transactions in the community.

The teachers' experiences in online teaching also had redeeming value. Because of the sudden move to teach online, teachers had to learn as much as they can about the nature and systems of online learning management and available teaching applications, which can help, engage their students. The following are the additional themes as analyzed.

4. Increased time management skills

Since online teaching makes use of synchronous and asynchronous sessions, teachers have learned to manage time well. They are able to seethe the most essential skills to be taught and create a well-defined timetable for class lectures and activities as well as the tasks for students. Aside from the time management with the academic works, teachers are able to make use of asynchronous schedules for personal and professional growth, not to mention developing new hobbies and learning new skills.

“Ganahan ko sa online teaching kai maka duwa duwa rako sa schedule.” (I like online teaching since I can play with the schedule) I learn to manage the tasks well and I can do other personal errands too.” (P5)

“I use the time for asynchronous to prepare my next synchronous. In this way, I am able to maximize my time well.” (P3)

“I am developing the hobby of planting flowers” na plantita nako ani kai naa man say time kanah ting asynchronous. (I am developing the hobby of planting flowers and I am now a certified, “plantita” since there is time to do this during the asynchronous.”

Teachers make use of hobbies as diversion and therapy from stress and anxieties brought about by the pandemic. Many are into planting, exercising at home like *zumba* dancing and crocheting. With the asynchronous time for teaching, teachers are still being productive.

5. *Increased in technological knowledge*

School administrators hurriedly prepared and offered crash trainings and webinars on the use of technology here and there. It is to capacitate and address the growing demands for online teaching. Since there were no other options, teachers had to embrace the digital experience and in the process, they increased their technological knowledge. They considered the advantages of using social media as well in their teaching. The use of social media is not just to address the clamor of the digital natives. There is a very rich source of reinforcement and enrichment input the students can get from social media (Mananay, 2018).

Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2007) stressed that teachers adapted to technology the moment they saw impact on their students' engagement and learning. Thus, they were ignited to try out other applications and designs for their teaching.

"I have learned to use Canva which I never imagined using before. (P2)

"Google classroom is not as difficult as I thought it was. Dali raman diay cya. (It's easy to use it). I am learning a lot jud. (I am really learning a lot) (P4)

6. *Increase in flexibility*

Teachers have valued more the importance of being flexible and understanding the reality that blended learning is here to stay. Many have realized that instruction can be successful and there is learning via online. Thus, they are adjusted to the now normal of teaching. As mentioned,

"I am more flexible and understanding when it comes to dealing with my students and I give them many chances especially when it comes to class deadlines." (P3)

"The new normal in teaching includes online class. So I think I am ready since I have learned to b flexible." (P2)

Additionally, online teaching allows the teachers to be productive at home like taking care of their children and household chores,

balancing work and life. With the remote work set up, teachers can accept high workload and plan their schedules ahead (Cole et al., 2014). In the parlance of teaching and learning in the New Normal, the role of teachers has immensely been emphasized more as innovators of change. The changes and challenges prompted by the virtual learning environment shed light to teaching being a multifaceted profession (Alda et al., 2022)

IV. CONCLUSION

The teachers' experiences on the online teaching are a combination of both struggles and successes. Since the phenomenon of online teaching came as a surprise, there was a great need to adjust and embrace the new digital experience and everything else that comes along with it. Though many were inept with technology at the beginning, they were able to learn and absorb the many trainings given along the way. Teachers see the beauty of technology, the different applications and online resources for their teaching. There were issues about online teaching like disruption brought by connectivity and unrelated noise around, still there are also benefits like teachers increased flexibility and technological knowledge. The experiences of teachers online can be a mirror for the creation of future policies related to online or blended learning.

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