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Challenges and Opportunities of Online Learning Modality: Experiences of Social Science College Teachers in a Philippine Private School

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Abstract. Online learning has become a popular teaching modality used by educational institutions worldwide due to the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper intends to describe the experience of Social Science teachers in the conduct of online classes in a private school in Southern Negros in the Philippines. The study used phenomenological research to inquire about the online class experience of four social sciences instructors. The researcher employed the Realistic Phenomenological research design via an in-depth interview technique to elicit responses relevant to the topic and used the three C's of Lichtman to generate the themes from the units of relevant meanings extracted from the interview transcripts. The findings reveal that they experienced challenges and opportunities in conducting the online class. The challenges include loss/Lack of internet connections, confusion and adjustments, Lack of motivation from the students to learn, and forming students to become lazy. On the other hand, online teaching helps teachers learn the new technology, flexibility of time and locations, diverse and enriching experience, online resources accessibility, and collaboration among colleagues.

Keywords. Education, Teaching, Social Science Teachers, Catholic Institutions, Negros Occidental, Philippines, qualitative-phenomenological

1. Introduction

Tertiary education provides opportunities that are unique to individuals' development and quality of promoting shared-prosperity. (24). Thus, there will be a significant social impact on the youth's expansion outside of their education and prospects if the tertiary system fails to sustain its effectiveness (25).

Today in the global pandemic, Higher Educational Sectors are facing many challenges. One of which is the massive youth disengagements and deprivations of graduate professionals (25). Moreover, private universities and colleges are now closing their campuses and adapting online and flexible learning (24). It was suggested that the educational stakeholders, especially the teachers, should become more adaptive and innovative in practicing the mentioned learning method (10).

In Asia, the Higher Educational System faces a challenge in reinventing specific educational modalities to overcome barriers and threats of the current pandemic (COVID-19). Higher education systems are now becoming futuristic (22). To counter the threats of the

current pandemic (COVID-19), the educational institutions are now strengthening their practices towards the curriculum and be much of responsive in stratifying and overseeing the needs of the teachers and other stakeholders (8), especially the students, even beyond the hours associated within the standard working period

In the Philippines, social distancing has become a viable solution. As a result, it hampers students in engaging themselves towards their developmental and practical subjects in laboratory activities, small group interaction, and lecture halls (1). Thus, their main problem was concerning educational resources accessibility and the teachers' approaches to modifying the Philippines' curriculum. With this, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued the Guidelines on the Implementation of Flexible Learning (4) for the conduct of the flexible learning modalities in higher education in the Philippines.

Hence, the paper intends to describe the experience of Social Science teachers in the conduct of online classes in a private school in Southern Negros in the Philippines.

2. Method

Critical to the quality of any research entails the careful selection of research design which contributes to the articulation of profound and substantive results (14). This study utilized a qualitative research design that concerned primarily with learning a person's experience in an approach that is humane and explanative (9). Hence, the qualitative research approach gives rich information about people's situations and real-life experiences (6).

Phenomenology is an inductive-descriptive method that aims to describe participants' lived experiences (phenomena) in an attempt to enrich the lived experience by drawing out its meaning (26). It also examines the particular experiences of unique individuals in a given situation, thus exploring not what is (reality) but what is preconceived to be. It further concerns the meaning and the way in which the meaning arises from experience. This method simply aims to discover and describe the primordial meanings or essence of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (15). The process brackets or suspends all previous knowledge of the phenomenon being explored that is not due to the actual instance of the phenomenon (9)

The participants are four Social Science College Instructors from a private school in Southern Negros. Purposive sampling is used in this study. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study.

The interview was individually done to obtain perspectives, the experience of online teaching from the participants. The use of in-depth interviews facilitated the gathering of detailed and useful information to provide the context to the data (14). Guided by the interview protocol, the participants were oriented on the purpose of the study, duration of the interview, the interview approach, content, confidentiality, consent, and recording methods, and the use of the data. To facilitate the phenomenological method, the recursive textual data analysis was used to determine what the experience means for the participants who experienced the phenomenon (15). Guided by the three C's of Lichtman (15)—coding, categorizing, and conceptualizing, an in-depth, holistic understanding of online teaching as experienced by social science faculty of school was culled out.

3. Results

The main purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of Social Science teachers in the conduct of online classes in a private Catholic school in Southern Negros Occidental in the Philippines.

The COVID-19 global pandemic pushes the education sectors to restructure the educational landscape to fit in with the needs of the new normal. The adoption of a flexible learning modality includes the utilization of online instruction that, on the process posing various challenges that teachers and learners need to handle.

3.1 Facing the online learning modality challenges

As first-time teachers handling online classes, they encounter a lot of challenges which include the following, loss/lack of internet connections, confusion and adjustments, Lack of motivation from the students to learn, and forming students to become lazy.

Teachers have been to use face-to-face instructions and utilize computers only for PowerPoint presentations, encoding reports, and examinations, or simply watching videos. They are not used to make their own blogs, vlogs, demonstration videos, and graphic and animated instructional presentations. These are key activities needed in teaching the subjects online.

Loss or Lack of internet connections

Loss/lack of internet connections is a challenge among our educators in online platforms, considering that here in the Philippines in general and here in southern Negros, in particular, cellular network infrastructures are limited. Cellular network towers are concentrated in urban areas, while in far-flung rural areas, these are limited. Consequently, searching for electronic materials for research work, finding related readings, watching educational videos, or simply accessing teachers' uploaded modules is impossible to experience. This leads to multiple problems such as loss of interest, irritability, or boredom.

The four respondents said that the loss/lack of internet connections is always the challenge in online teaching.

"I am in the middle of my discussions, and then suddenly the connections are a loss."

"It is difficult to teach because of the poor signal."

"It is also hard when you have very poor signal, and it will be the reason for feeling frustrated."

"Online classes are more hassle than face to face because sometimes internet connection is cut off."

Confusion and adjustments

Confusion and adjustments are a challenge among educators because some are not ready since they lack proper training, familiarity, preparations in terms of time, learning content. In contrast, others felt emotional inadequacy since they cannot tackle online issues such as inappropriate comments from students.

Online instructions further require users on the mastery of Learning Management System such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, and Schoology that is used to manage the teaching-learning process.

Learning content must be adequate, coherent, interdisciplinary, and grammatical error-free. In ensuring quality, teachers should ensure precision and that the sources are valid and reliable.

"Feeling sad, disconnected, or isolated."

"I need to adjust for my teaching styles and delivery of learning."

"It is difficult to teach online because I do not use the application or LMS."

"My first online class quite hard because I do not use the application."

Lack of motivation from the students to learn

Lack of motivation from the students to learn is a challenge since some of the students lack intrinsic motivations due to their personal values attached to learning, particularly in online learning since they prefer playing games rather than listening to lectures and discussions.

"My students always late in class, and their alibi is that no connection, no-load, etc."

"Students can't understand the lecture because of lack of motivation to study."

"Students are not motivated to study, and they prefer to play ML."

"Students are not motivated to study."

We are forming students to become lazy

Hooking up to online games is a distraction to online learning. Diverted attention among students changes their focus and priority, which later put their studies as the least priority.

"Online classes allow a student to be lazy."

"Students cheat in quizzes and exams in online learning."

"Students just copy-paste their answer from the internet."

"Some students are always late in attending the online class."

3.2 Getting the most out of the online learning modality

Online instruction does not merely post challenges but opportunities. As there is a change in approach, a change of skills needed should be calibrated. Teachers need to retool their capabilities and find another means of exploring creativity through computer-assisted teaching. The opportunities identified by the teachers include learning new technology, the flexibility of time and location, enriching experience, and online resource accessibility, including collaboration among colleagues.

Help teachers learn the new technology.

Learning new technology is an opportunity for teachers since through this, they can be sent to seminars and training workshops where they can enhance their skills in preparing, conducting, or delivering lessons in online classes.

"Since I am not good in LMS, I need to study how to operate it."

"I need to attend a seminar on how to use the LMS and different platforms for online teaching."

"I equip myself with the new application for teaching online."

"I attended webinars for online teaching."

The flexibility of time and location

The flexibility of time and location is an opportunity for teachers since they can teach and deliver lesson not only in the confines of schools and classrooms but also in their homes become an ideal setting to ensure physical distancing but do not allow a face to face social interactions except virtually where educators and students creativity can still be shown.

"In online teaching, you can just teach anywhere at any time in your own phase."

"You don't need to go to school to conduct classes".

"One of the advantages of online teaching is that you don't need to go to school."

"Teaching online is very flexible."

Enriching Experiences

Enriching Experiences is an opportunity for teachers to venture into new modalities of the teaching and learning process; through this, the teacher can utilize different learning styles and coping abilities of students in learning concepts, principles in a modern technological age.

"A great opportunity to enhance the user experience in the field of virtual learning."

"It was a successful experience for me and the students. We both acquired new skills and experience."

"I think that the experience was challenging to my students and me. I had to be a better teacher with new tools. The students also have to learn in a different surrounding."

"It is very challenging and productive too."

Online resources accessibility and collaboration among colleagues.

Online resources accessibility and collaboration among colleagues are opportunities for educators to work together to widen their technical grasp of these online platforms where teachers can come up with best practices in teaching in terms of principles, methodologies, and techniques. This can also bring about coherent and relevant curriculum planning and development to further the pursuit of education in our country.

"There are many resources that we can get on the internet, and my fellow teachers and I help each other."

"Online collaboration among colleagues help the burden of online teaching."

"What I like in online teaching is that collaboration among teachers we help each other."

"Online teaching is very challenging but rewarding too because of collaboration among colleagues."

4. Discussion

The results of the study indicate challenges and opportunities among social science teachers teaching online classes in a private college in Southern Negros. Online classes are a great way to cut costs and expand learning opportunities for teachers and students who require more flexibility in their schedules. Their experiences in online classes include challenges and opportunities such as loss/lack of internet connections, confusion and adjustments, Lack of motivation from the students to learn, and forming students to become lazy. On the other hand, online teaching helps teachers learn the new technology, flexibility of time and locations, diverse and enriching experience, online resources accessibility, and collaboration among colleagues.

Online teaching was challenging equally for both teachers and students—challenges in terms of the availability of stable internet for all, especially in some remote areas. Internet network systems and electricity supply are not always reliable. Thus internet connections and electricity shortages have actually interfered with access to the teaching and learning platform.

Self-efficacy is defined as a belief in one's own ability to perform (2). Research suggests self-efficacy can play both a negative and positive role in motivation. Bandura reports higher self-efficacy encourages higher goal selection, the increased effort put forth in frustrating situations, and a higher likelihood of setting a new, more difficult goal to attain after achieving success. Self-efficacy, however, can hinder an individual's success in the area of planning. Students with higher self-efficacy allot less time for studying and allocate fewer resources for completing a task, which can lead to decreased performance (2).

Students and all other learners often use these electronic lessons and activities asynchronously. Despite working at their own pace, online students reported an interest in

interacting with the instructor and their peers (18). Since educators provide different guidance to online learners (for example, a recommended schedule and assistance with questions through e-mail or discussion boards), participants rely on their own motivation to complete these activities. Determining factors that influence student motivation in the online learning environment will provide insight into how learning objects can be modified to improve online learning and student performance.

Support of online faculty including faculty development has been explored in the context of faculty effectiveness (19). The teachers believed that the students engaged in the quality, substantive, and depth of learning (10).

Virtual collaboration occurs when faculty learn from each other by sharing knowledge and reflecting on common experiences using technology (11). Virtual collaboration may take place via e-mail, online faculty forums, virtual learning communities, online mailing lists, and other forms of communication facilitated by technology.

5. Conclusion

Online teaching is a new dimension for the teaching-learning process where teachers engage in technology, tapping their innate skills and creativity. It has also brought positive impacts on the lives of teachers. It helps teachers to learn the technology and to collaborate with one another. Although online learning has several challenges such as loss/lack of internet connections, confusion and adjustments, Lack of motivation from the students to learn, and forming students to become lazy, these limitations can be overcome by upgrading the E-Learning systems and the use of online discussion forums.

On the other hand, online teaching helps teachers learn the new technology, flexibility of time and locations, diverse and enriching experience, online resources accessibility, and collaboration among colleagues. Online education has also helped the faculty to save time in which they can interact with the students more. In the era of digitalization, the scope of online education increases even more and will be beneficial for students, professionals, and also institutions.

Generally, the experience of social sciences teachers in online learning modality are both challenging and gratifying.

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