

Teaching in the New Normal through the Lenses of English Teachers

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Abstract

This study looked into the challenges that two Senior High School teachers of English and four Junior High School teachers who taught in a Schools Division in one of the cities in the Philippines encountered in teaching English to high school students, into their coping strategies, and into the insights they gained into such experiences vis-à-vis lesson preparation, lesson delivery, modular teaching modality, and assessment of students' outputs in the New Normal during the School Year 2020-2021. Narrative research design was employed, and thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within the data provided by the participants who composed the entire population. The findings reveal the following themes that were gleaned from the participants' responses. As for the challenges the participants encountered, the following themes were obtained: (1) Preparing Learning Activities that Best Suit Students' Needs; (2) Finding Ways and Means to Reach Out to Students; (3) Lack of Supervision Engenders Unanswered Retrieved Modules or Unreturned Modules; and (4) Ensuring the Authenticity of Students' Answers. As regards the coping strategies the participants employed in dealing with the challenges they encountered, the following themes were derived: (1) Functioning at an Optimal Level by Engaging in Favorable Plans of Action; (2) Strategizing Ways to Promote Transfer of Learning; (3) Exuding Optimism and Providing Avenues to Facilitate Distance Learning; and (4) Making Room for Students to Submit Well-thought-out Outputs. With respect to the insight gained by the participants into the challenges they came up against and into the coping strategies they utilized to face up to those challenges, the following themes were attained: (1) Flexible and Enthusiastic Teaching Lead to Successful Lesson Planning; (2); Communication, Creativity, and Corroboration Foster Comprehension Amongst Students (3) Communication and Patience Cultivate an Environment Conducive to Modular Distance Learning; and (4) Devising a Course of Action for Evaluating Students' Work is Propitious. Indeed, the teachers had the fortitude to face the difficulties that the New Normal brought and discovered that communication, creativity, corroboration, patience, and a plan for evaluating students' outputs could all contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Keywords— modular teaching modality, New Normal, Philippines, teaching English

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of English has escalated as it has become the means of communication in the world in various circumstances [18, 5]. Without a doubt, every adolescent needs to be proficient in English [4]. The call for efficient and effective teaching of the English language skills must be heeded, and it may necessitate a carefully designed pedagogy [30]. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed the whole world in the New Normal, which refers to how the all-important facets of human life have been altered [9] and has engendered ramifications specifically in the teaching-learning process. In the New Normal, conversions of information to digital formats imposed schemes for doing tasks and gaining knowledge and where education was compelled more into integrating technology into teaching-

learning practices, sustained by the dominant market mindset and commercialism (25). It is important to recognize the enormous concern that instructors have gone through during the pandemic (5), which has led to the New Normal. (21) revealed that secondary grammar school teachers experienced a lot of stress when classes were significantly disrupted by the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(26, as cited in 23) identified stressors that cause tension among educators, namely: (1) Teachers lack the means to talk through pandemics and qualms about their learners' dearth of technological skills; (2) Extremely perturbed and despondent learners who cannot entirely pay particular attention to learning and who are concerned about the untypical closure of schools; (4) Parents who are

troubled with the disadvantages that the pandemic has engendered, who are not prepared to tutor their children about technological tools and novel educational practices, and who are attempting to balance work and home education; and (4) Continuance of positive student-teacher relationships and challenging online collaborative learning socialization.

The survey on English language teaching and Covid-19 that the British Council conducted in over 150 countries from April 2020 to May 2020 revealed that the teachers were interested in keeping students motivated, ensuring that lessons run smoothly without disruptive behavior from students, assessing students' outputs from a distance, involving underprivileged persons, the welfare of both the student and the teacher, poor or no internet connection, getting students ready for examinations, apprehensions about students cheating, helping students become totally responsible for their learning, dearth of appropriate tools for teachers and learners, guidance on designing online lessons and online tasks, and preparation that takes a great amount of time [7].

In the Philippines, both private and public schools are confronted with the following challenges in the New Normal: inaccessibility to and expensiveness of computers and computer programs, compliance with health and safety protocols that govern modular learning without the internet, construction of teaching materials for online learning, a lack of readiness in employing teaching methods for online learning, difficulty in checking and assessing the performance of students, the effects of problems at home on online learning, increasing challenges to the mental, psychological, and social health of teachers, students, and parents, and an acceptance that unforeseen circumstances may arise every time a class resumes [4].

Few studies paid rapt attention to lesson preparation, lesson delivery, modular teaching modality, and assessment of students' outputs in the New Normal. Therefore, it was reckoned gainful to conduct this study, which can provide information about the experiences of high school teachers teaching English in the New Normal.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the experiences of public High School teachers of English in the Philippines during the School Year 2020-2021. Specifically, this study intended to identify their challenges, coping strategies, and insight into their experiences in terms of lesson preparation, lesson delivery, modular teaching modality, and assessment of students' outputs.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The narrative research design, which aims to “unravel consequential stories of people’s lives as told by them in their own words and worlds” [24], was employed in this study. As a method of analysis, the six-step guide of [6] was used. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” [6]. In this study, themes within the data gathered (participants’ responses) were identified, analyzed, and presented to unravel the experiences of six participants who were the only teachers of English (aside from the researcher) in the school where this study was conducted. [13] asseverated that “an extremely large number of articles, book chapters, and books recommend guidance and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate.”

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The following themes vis-à-vis each research objective are presented.

A. Challenges Encountered in Teaching English to High School Students in the New Normal

The participants came up against situations that entailed mustering their wits to be able to teach English to high school students in the New Normal.

1. Preparing Learning Activities that Best Suit Students’ Needs

Likewise, [29] held that teachers in the New Normal had to make sure that students learned by adapting lessons to the new teaching modality.

2. Finding Ways and Means to Reach Out to Students

[27] also found out that public school teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced a dearth of resources to communicate with their students. Similarly, [1] discovered that communication levels among students and teachers dropped. Moreover, [19] revealed that to their participants, reaching out to students and parents was a challenge.

3. Lack of Direct Supervision Engenders Unanswered Retrieved Modules or Unreturned

Modules

[11] revealed that their respondents who were high school students wrestled with studying their modules by themselves. Moreover, the respondents’ parents were not equipped with knowledge that could guide their children as they worked on their modules. According to ten secondary school teachers in the Philippines, module preparation was

time-consuming, printing materials were scarce, and the time and assistance for printing modules were not sufficient.

4. Ensuring the Authenticity of Students' Answers

Anent to supervising students' performance, ten secondary school teachers who utilized modular teaching found it difficult to communicate with their students and could not also establish the authenticity of their students' works. Moreover, students could not submit their accomplished modules on the deadlines set, some modules were unnamed, some modules were submitted with incomplete answers, time for checking students' outputs was not enough due to the need to accomplish other tasks, and students had low scores or indecipherable penmanship [9]. In Malaysia, ESL teachers were confronted with students' underperformance [22]. [17] revealed in their study that students committed dishonest acts in regards doing their outputs and that students had a hard time submitting their outputs. Likewise, [16] found out that their teacher-participants could not establish the veracity of their students' answers in modules.

B. Coping Strategies Employed in Dealing with the Challenges Encountered in Teaching English to High School Students in the New Normal

Amidst the challenges in teaching English to high school students in the New Normal, the participants availed themselves of ways they knew would embolden them to get through.

1. Functioning at an Optimal Level by Engaging in Favorable Plans of Action

By the same token, [9] held that education stakeholders should work hand in hand and should be ready with plans to deal with the issues that plagued the teaching-learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. [28] divulged that secondary teachers from various content areas needed to make adjustments in their lessons in the New Normal since they believed that such modifications would have a strong impact on the creation and continuous delivery of lessons, and on the assessment of student learning.

2. Strategizing Ways to Promote Transfer of Learning

Correspondingly, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Chinese universities believed that integrating traditional teaching in online teaching could be a coping mechanism [15]. [12] and [16] revealed that their teacher-participants regarded collaboration and peer mentoring as their coping strategies. [28] revealed that secondary teachers from different content areas in one school in the Midwest region in the United States of America adjusted their lessons to the New Normal, which

they believed could have an effect on the delivery of lessons.

3. Exuding Optimism and Providing Avenues to Facilitate Distance Learning

[2] divulged in their study that novice teachers used coping mechanisms to obtain a state of psychological and spiritual calm in teaching in the New Normal. Relatedly, [23] found out that language teachers maintained positivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. [12] revealed that secondary teachers were open to changes that were linked to distance learning and worked hand in hand with their students' parents.

4. Making Room for Students to Submit Well-thought-out Outputs

The teacher-participants in the studies of [12] and [16] found time management to be a useful coping strategy. [27] discovered that teachers would communicate with students and understand the New Normal situation for educational goals to come to fruition.

C. Insight Gained into the Challenges Encountered and into the Coping Strategies Employed in Teaching English to High School Students in the New Normal

The participants had considerable latitude in obtaining insights into the challenges that they encountered and the coping styles that they put into practice in teaching English to high school students in the New Normal.

1. Flexible and Enthusiastic Teaching Can Lead to Successful Lesson Planning

According to [27], adaptability to and consideration for differences in how students comprehend, react to, and handle varying circumstances in the New Normal were adjudged by public school teachers pivotal in deciding on lessons in advance. Likewise, taking into account the multiple intelligences of students during lesson planning was recognized by English teachers in the southern part of the Philippines [8].

2. Communication, Creativity, and Corroboration Foster Comprehension Amongst Students

In fifteen Moroccan universities, professors regarded training for the use of technological tools as vital in aiding students to learn [14]. Correspondingly, [21] found out that three hundred eighty teachers from Germany gave credence to digital skills that could stimulate their interest in using technology for remote teaching during the pandemic. By the same token, online teachers from two private schools in Nepal considered sufficient trainings on the use of Information and Communication Technology as vital in engaging in a teaching modality other than On-Campus teaching modality.

3. Communication and Patience Cultivate an Environment Conducive to Modular Distance Learning

In Indonesia, English teachers regarded face-to-face teaching as a positive teaching modality compared to online learning when it came to technological issues, student participation, and social exchange [20]. Meanwhile, [14] discovered that students and teachers found face-to-face instruction to be more interesting than online learning.

4. Devising a Course of Action for Evaluating Students' Works is Propitious

[12] and [16] revealed that their teacher-participants believed that time management helped them determine the exact time to check students' outputs.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of this study.

1. The teachers believed that they must understand that the current teaching-learning situation entails creating learning activities that are appropriate for students' educational needs.
2. The teachers mustered up their courage to put up with the challenges that the New Normal brought about.
3. The teachers had a deep understanding of the challenges and coping strategies in teaching English in the New Normal.

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