

Academic Online Teaching Experiences of English Teachers: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

One of the most intriguing issues of the present time is the application of online teaching in education. This became more popular when the pandemic happened. Thus, making the educational sectors address the demands of the present time. In particular, this paper examined the experiences of Junior High School English teachers of two universities in the city of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines. The study used transcendental phenomenology as a research approach (Creswell, 2007). In the gathering of data, a semi-structured interview was conducted online. Creswell's modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of Moustakas (1994) was utilized in the data analysis. Findings showed four emerging themes namely: 1) Sense of Fulfillment; 2) Challenges; 3) Use of Relevant / Appropriate Strategies; and, 4) Development of Values, Skills, Virtues, and Qualities. These themes point to the essence of resiliency and adaptability experienced by the teachers in their online teaching. Specifically, the success or fulfillment, as well as the challenges experienced by the participants of the study, have made them adaptable and resilient to address the demands of their profession. The findings point to the need for academic online teachers to impart their knowledge, skills, and experiences to their fellow teachers.

Keywords: online teaching experience, essence, phenomenology

Introduction

The advent of online learning in education awakened significant inquiries in the teaching and learning process, quality of instruction, the layout of digitalized knowledge, and the social role of education. As education plays a vital role in cultivating the social and moral responsibilities of the youth, schools continue to innovate instruction that best suits the abilities and intelligence of their students. With the present pandemic due to the 2019 Novel Corona Virus (2019-nCov), schools ventured into strategies and approaches that are aligned with their pedagogical philosophies.

More so, in the course of the proclamation of tightening the health protocols in the city, there was a call for schools to adopt innovative computer-assisted instruction as mandated by the Inter Agency-Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases resolution on the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan of the Department of Education (DepEd Order No. 014s. 2020: Guidelines on the Required Health Standards in Basic Education Offices and Schools).

Moreover, teachers' experiences vary as years of service are different too. Teachers who have been in the field for at least three years are considered tenured (2010 Revised Manual of Regulations for Private Schools in the Basic Education, DepEd

Order No. 88 S. 2018, Section 63). Their experiences with this new type of educational learning are relevant topics at this time. English teachers as a group could have encountered different challenges in teaching communication skills in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and viewing.

When the pandemic started, many teachers, even those who have experienced teaching English online, adjusted to the said instruction. These adjustments in technological skills are one of the problems among English teachers. Nevertheless, it is not just about the application of suggestions given to teachers, particularly those who are at the first time in the online teaching world but also to those who have been teaching for years via face-to-face instruction. It is said that various online teaching strategies are developed and used by the teachers just to cater to students' needs.

Moreover, the quick change of methodological approaches in education adopted by schools in the city at present must have surprised teachers. As termed by Tria (2020), this present pandemic brought extraordinary challenges among the scholastic sectors, especially educational leaders. She likewise mentioned that planning and implementation strategy, assessing online learning systems to schools, a survey on platforms online, projects, programs, assessment, and revision of curricula development of instructional materials are some of the areas that may be revisited. It is, thus, imperative to gain a deep understanding of the English teachers' experiences in teaching online with the hope of exploring innovative strategies in facilitating online learning; hence, this study is hinged.

The overall purpose of the phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of select tenured English subject teachers in Junior High School from the two universities in Cagayan de Oro City.

Research Design

This study used the Qualitative Research Design. Specifically, it employed phenomenology as a method to describe the phenomenon of online academic challenges of experienced teachers. Following the phenomenological tradition of the German Mathematician-Philosopher Edmund Husserl, this study followed transcendental phenomenology intending to offer more room to the description of the experience of the participants rather than on the researcher's interpretation (Creswell, 2007). This phenomenological approach is an important method in exploring the participant's experience. In this study, the English teachers' online teaching experiences were explored as a phenomenon.

Research Instrument

The semi-structured interview was used to collect the data or information from the participants. A semi-structured interview is a conference in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formal list of questions (Lonzon, 2020). More open-ended questions leading to a discussion with the interviewee were asked rather than having a straightforward question-and-answer format. The participants were asked to describe their experiences in online teaching. Before the conduct of the interview, the panel members verified the questions that were asked to the participants of the study.

Data Analysis Procedure

Methods

English teachers' experiences in the face-to-face classroom are far too different from this new normal mode of learning – online learning. The study aimed to understand the English teachers' experiences in facilitating online learning in high school classrooms.

The Phenomenological method of data analysis was used in the study. Transcendental or psychological phenomenology is focused more on the descriptions of the participants than the interpretations of the researchers. The subjectivity of the collated facts will be acknowledged through what was first described by Husserl (1970) as bracketing. This study focused on the experiences of the teachers rather than the students.

Though a phenomenological study focused on a small sample size and results cannot be generalized to a greater population, this study aimed to uncover data that may provide a clear vision for developing effective, equitable, and inclusive educational courses for online students.

Flow of the Study

This paper adopted the phenomenological principles of Creswell (2007) in the organization of the data; which consists of the following:

(1) Comprehensive description of experiences with the phenomenon.

First, the participants describe their personal experiences in detail about the phenomenon under study. IAs such, any conducted research or survey should observe confidentiality and informed consent from the participants (Kelly et.al 2003).

(2) “Epoche” or ‘Bracketing’. Second, ‘Epoche’ or ‘bracketing’ are the tenets in data analysis. It is associated with ‘staying away from’ (Moustakas, 1994) and ‘freedom from suppositions’ (Husserl, 1931). The researcher sets aside his or her personal experiences about the phenomenon under study and restrains his or her prejudgment and assumptions to prevent biases in the conceptualization of significant meaning and essences (Creswell, 2006). In this case, ‘epoche’ prompts the researcher to go to the original existence of the data, and thus, the researcher’s own take and claim of the phenomenon is disregarded and unrecognized.

(3) Horizontalization or listing of significant statements. Third, horizontalization is “the process of identifying verbatim parts of the transcribed interviews that explain the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994). An important step to the phenomenological analysis of data, the researcher treats every statement of the participants equally valuable to each other (Urdahl & Creswell, 2004) and noteworthy verbatim is identified and is used as significant statements in analyzing the data, and horizontalized statements are retained.

(4) Coding and clustering significant statements to form meaning units or themes. Fourth, coding is the process of labeling and organizing the qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Medelyan, 2021). Initial code is done to group significant statements. Then, number codes are created to form the themes in the study. Significant statements of the participants are utilized as the very source to identify the themes (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

(5) Producing textural descriptions of experience and building of structural descriptions Fifth, textural descriptions emphasize vividly describing the ‘what’ of the phenomenon (Cordes, 2014). Mainly, this involves emerging descriptive narratives of each participant based on the horizontalized statements (Chennamsetti, 2010). In this case, the researcher meaningfully utilizes the specific quotes from the verbatim transcripts to understand, describe, and define the phenomenon fully. Moreover, individual textual descriptions are examined and combined into one group description to form a composite textural description of experiences of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994).

On the other hand, Urdahl & Creswell (2004) described structural descriptions as ‘how’ the participants experienced the phenomenon. In other words, meanings are sought from the why and how the participants experience the notion under study (Chennamsetti, 2010). In this manner, all individual textual descriptions are combined to present the composite textural descriptions of all the participants as a group (Chennamsetti, 2010).

(6) Combined description of essences. Sixth is the description of essences as the final step of the data analysis procedure. The essence is associated with the “core meaning mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (Patton, 2002). These are meanings concluded from the textural-structural descriptions to depict the essence of the phenomenon solely based on the participants’ perspectives and personal points of view (Chennamsetti, 2010). Figure 1 shows the study flow.

Phenomenology, in contrast to other qualitative traditions, has a fairly structured method of analysis, as advanced by Moustakas, (1994). Creswell presented a simplified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (2007) from Moustakas (1994). Using Moustakas (1994) approach, the study used the systematic steps in the analysis of data in both procedure and its guidelines to assemble textural and structural descriptions, Creswell (2018).

With this version, Creswell (2007) outlined the procedure into six steps. The researcher followed these steps in the analysis of the data. In the first step, the researcher identified the Higher Education Institution that has Junior High School Level. The second step was to develop the list of significant statements from the transcripts of the interviews and the other sources of data. Here, the researcher was able to generate a list of statements that were non-repetitive and were not overlapping with other statements.

In the third step, the researcher clustered the significant statements into larger units of information which Creswell (2007) called “meaning units” or “themes”. The fourth step involved writing. The researcher described the “what” of the participants’ experience. Creswell (2007) called it the “textural description” of the experience. After the textural description, the fifth step involved writing how the members practice the phenomenon in terms of context, situations, or conditions. Creswell (2007) called this the “structural description” of the experience.

Last, the researcher wrote the “composite description”, as Creswell (2007) called it, the experience. This description is the combination of the textural and structural explanations or the search for the “essence” of the experience. The validation and scrutiny of the interview transcripts of the participants laid down meaningful and great interpretations of essences. Their verbatim transcripts had undergone in-depth analysis before the segmenting of data sets, coding, labeling themes, and describing the conceptual properties underlying the participants’ narratives about the phenomenon.

Participants of the Study

The study focused on the experiences of tenured English subject teachers of two identified schools in Cagayan de Oro City.

Following Moustakas (1994) principle of no fewer than five participants and no more than twenty-five participants, the study was set to interview seven (7) English teachers. All of them were licensed, professional teachers and already in the field for at least 3 years.

Results and Discussion

From the responses of the teachers, four themes emerged namely: 1) Sense of Fulfillment; 2) Challenges; 3) Use of Relevant / Appropriate Strategies; and, 4) Development of Values, Skills, Virtues, and Qualities.

Sense of Fulfilment pertains to one of the experiences of the participants in teaching online. This description captured the ability of the participants to make use of their prior experience in online teaching which enabled them to adjust and create meaningful experiences. With this, they were able to acquire new abilities in using the online platform.

These descriptions were supported by Godshall (2013) who said that individuals increase in knowledge when they feel a sense of fulfillment. Teachers who believed they are fulfilled in their professions and being supported by the school find their jobs fulfilling and that they are able to improve their teaching performance.

Significant descriptions were gathered such as Familiarity with the Online Tool, Ability to Adjust using the Online Platform, Acquiring the Capacity of using the Platform as shown in the following descriptions:

Exemplars related to this theme include:

(1.a) Familiarity with the Online Tool

This experience of online teaching is not anymore new to me (Participant 1)

I really thought of my very first online teaching... at first it wasn't difficult. (Participant 4)

Bowden (2019) discussed that those teachers who have experienced online teaching through online tutorials helped students' expectations in online learning platforms in a more sophisticated way.

(1.b) Ability to Adjust using the Online Platform

I would really say that pandemic may be a bad experience, but the results like learning online, teaching online, exploring beautiful things about Google, Zoom and everything, I would say it's a good... beautiful experience ...I am glad that I experienced it. (Participant 1)

The English teachers really adjust into the different dynamics, approaches, or methods in delivering learning to students. (Participant 1)

Teachers' ideas and points of view about their experiences in online teaching can influence multiple levels of education by enhancing people's viewpoints of teaching and in what is comparatively new in this educational platform, (Barbour, 2013 & Barbour 2014) as mentioned by Sims (2017).

(1.c) Acquiring the Capacity of using the Platform

*So to sum it up, my experience of online teaching as a whole, at first it was **frustrating** then it became **rewarding**. (Participant 1)*

In the 1st and 2nd grading period I was really having a very hard time. 3rd grading period up to 4th grading period, I can now say that I'm already comfortable with the platform. (Participant 3)

The second theme, challenges that emerged in the study was the challenges that the participants experienced in the course of their English online teaching. Going through the narratives, participants showed emotional challenges along with their experience with students who have competence difficulty (understanding, comprehension, performance, and motivation). More so, the teachers also experienced the challenge of internet connection. Based on the transcripts collated from the participants, the following were their narratives:

(2.a) Negative Emotions

"I felt the same confusion and also felt the same frustrations as what my teachers had during those times. I would say again it's frustrating, very frustrating." (Participant 1)

To be honest, during the first semester I was really so anxious. (Participant 2)

You see that it is legit burnout. (Participant 2)

Describing the cause of emotional experiences among the online English subject teachers does not substitute for any word of what they have felt. (Barrett, et. al., 2007) in the online teaching platform.

(2.b) Connectivity Issue

Their ability to participate in all of those activities depend as well on their internet connections. (Participant 3)

Where we draw the line to believe that the students are abusing the idea if they don't have a good connection that's why they cannot put on their camera... (Participant 4)

The internet connection, which sometimes is being distractive. (Participant 7)

The high bandwidth or strong internet connection needed by online courses is not given to many students. and thus fail to catch up with their virtual classes (Saminathan, 2020)

(2.c) Students' Competence

Students cannot easily navigate what is needed to navigate. (Participant 2)

Actually the hardest part of it is that how will the students get your lessons, how will they be equipped with the learning competencies that they should possess. (Participant 3)

Emotion is often defined as a complex state of sensation that results in a difference in terms of how one thinks and behaves based on the impact of both the physical and the psychological norm. On this note, the negative emotions of the online subject teachers mentioned above carried the impact of online teaching in their

profession. Carlyle (2001) likewise mentioned that emotion is a vital component in understanding the relationship between stress and illness, since emotions underpin the phenomenological experience of one's bodies in sickness and health, providing the 'basis for social reciprocity and exchange and the "link" between personal problems and broader public issues of social structure' (Williams, 1998: 124).

The results of the study revealed that there were some experiences encountered by the participants when they were dealing with online English subject teaching which are shown in the third theme, Use of Relevant / Appropriate Strategies. This theme includes Technical Applications, Intensive Preparation, Constant Assessment and Evaluation, Quality Feedback and Monitoring, Modified Personal Strategies, Motivational Strategies, and the use of the Learning Management System as a Tool. The use of strategies pertains to the activities that the participants were able to experience in their online classes. These descriptions were supported by Hullet (2018) who confirmed that strategies be developed to support online learners who receive low grades on any assignment. Such is done to encourage students who are putting off classwork or who are feeling discouraged or overwhelmed to recognize that they are cared for and that help is available. Teachers may identify strategies complementing them and will assist them to cope with the demands of English language online teaching, (Lee and Choi, 2011). Some platforms used in the strategies they applied are Kahoot, Google Jamboard and not to mention timeless oral recitation.

Technical applications, intensive preparation, constant assessment and evaluation, quality feedback and monitoring, personalized and motivational strategies, and the use of the Learning Management System as a tool were the strategies used by the teachers that made their experience teaching online more valuable.

(3.a) Technical Applications

The teacher should know how to manipulate basic programs. The online teaching demands more technicalities. (Participant 5)

Show them infographics that would really help them navigate faster and easier. (Participant 2)

Average content is also a major issue that makes students feel that lack of community, technical problems, and difficulties in understanding instructional goals are the major barriers for online learning (Song et al., 2004).

(3.b) Intensive Preparation

Personally, I am a firm believer of preparation. So, I make sure I prepare everything ahead of time...I really make sure I put my rules, I establish my routine on the first week...I should prepare this. (Participant 2)

What I actually meant with the hard preparation was that... to make materials and then let those materials be appropriate with my students. (Participant 3)

Roddy et. al (2017) mentioned that understanding how best to gauge student readiness or preparedness for online study is a critical institutional responsibility. Thus, strategizing how to have online classes, preparation is a strategy that teachers can make use of.

(3.c) Constant Assessment and Evaluation

I do manage giving them essays. Like, quizzes or assessments that would let them really speak from their hearts and from their minds. It is like; I gave them self- reflected answers, so, it is more than just the paper-pencil test. (Participant 3)

I think there should be an evaluation for that and its effectivity. (Participant 7)

(3.d) Quality Feedback and Monitoring

So, I get inside the classes of my teachers and observe them and I also give them early feedback if they have to know what are the things that are very admirable about what they do and also try to give them an honest assessment of the things they can improve especially on the things that are recommended for them to do in their other classes. (Participant 2)

I just do speaking tests/assessments through oral recitation and there are also instances, I mean there was one grading period which I gave an oral examination, oral exam in English. (Participant 3)

The results of the study presented the fact that teachers who have embraced online classes develop certain forms of values, skills, virtues, and qualities which encapsulated the fourth theme, Development of Values, Skills, Virtues, and Qualities. These developments led them to experience teaching online quite in a different way. These ideas were supported by the study of Gebhard (2006) saying several factors affect teachers' development. Furthermore, he said that there is no doubt that development takes time. It takes time to observe interaction in their classrooms. More so, he stated that development requires an ongoing commitment. This is enhanced when teachers commit to the said process of development. He likewise mentioned that development is enhanced through problem-solving.

(4.a) Values/Virtues (e.g. patience, tolerance, understanding, compassion and resilience)

My experience began with learning the virtues, having the virtues of patience and tolerance. (Participant 4)

(4.b) Skills

"I was able to engage in some different skills such as editing skills which I was not used to it before...the online teaching has given me the opportunity to engage more. To expand more my skills not just in teaching but also in other skills such as the video editing skills." (Participant 5)

Essence

The "essence" is a representation of what the phenomenological study truly is all about. Moustakas (1994) pertains to essence as a description of "what" the participants experienced.

Valuing resiliency and adaptability is the essence of online teaching experience. It is based on any teacher's desire to attend to the call of time and call of duty. Online teaching experience among the participants is deeply entrenched in the teacher's own daily experiences in life as they try to connect with their learners, to understand the broader picture of education in the society where they live, and to overcome challenges with a sense of fulfillment. To be resilient and adaptive is not

new when there is an involvement of change. Change in the context of teaching, that from face-to-face, teachers embraced online teaching. When they are given this as a gift, it becomes precious as it unfolds many chances of becoming a better teacher and be resilient. This becomes the essence of the study.

As averred by Dirkin (2008), instructors' teaching perspectives have an important effect on teaching and learning in their online courses. These perspectives differed, as experiences are different. Teachers of this study were able to explore the endless possibility of online teaching. Despite the pandemic, they were able to learn not just by giving their insights about the lesson of their subject but can attend to their students 24/7. Much from that, the teachers were able to distinguish the how and what they want to do.

Online teaching experience became a gift of time for teachers to carry out their tasks and passion. They were inspired to teach using the different strategies and LMS they used. Nevertheless, it may start as a simple fascination with online teaching but it ended up to something life-changing to most of the teachers. Online teaching experience became a gift of time, an instrument in learning in the 21st century.

Recommendations

From the findings of the study, online teaching experience among the participants transcends the boundaries of a face-to-face classroom set up to the virtual world. It has become the medium for teachers to teach and allowed them to create limitless strategies of learning. With this, it gives the participants a sense of fulfillment, creating a conducive virtual classroom where each learner's needs are the utmost priority. Participants can further hone their skills and adhere to quality education by making use of the learning management systems that their institutions have. Online teaching experience allows the participants to obtain the virtues and values of a teacher even in the newly used platform. They are able to understand that teaching online is a challenge but at the same time a very meaningful, fruitful, and passion-filled endeavor. Through the different themes formed in this study, teachers develop resilient and adaptive characters to face the new normal with the goal of maintaining quality education. The success/fulfillment, as well as the challenges experienced by the participants of the study, have made them adaptable and resilient to address the demands of their profession. The innovation made through the use of emerging strategies is a clear form of adaptability.

In consonance with the results of the study, the researcher endorses the following recommendations:

1. Academic Online Teachers may impart their knowledge and skills gained, strategies used, and challenges encountered in their online teaching experience to other teachers.
2. Future Researchers may look into other possible values/virtues or experiences that other English Language teachers experienced.

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