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From face-to-face to teaching at a distance: Lessons learned from emergency remote teaching

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Abstract: The Covid-19 disrupts not only the health, economic, and tourism sectors but it paralyzed the education sector as well. Since face-to-face teaching and learning environment is still not possible in the Philippine context, this phenomenon leaves the teachers to use various alternative ways of instructional delivery. The sudden shift of teaching and learning delivery continuously challenges not only the students but also the teachers who are serving as educational front liners at the time of the pandemic crisis. The lack of proper training and experiences of teachers in online teaching and distance education served as educational loopholes in the context of emergency remote education. Hence, this case study attempts to explore the experiences of K-12 senior high school teachers who have been immersed in emergency remote teaching. In analyzing the data gathered, the descriptive coding process was used. Interestingly, there were three themes reported in this study: getting the right mix of instructional methods, engaging in different open educational resources and information, and highlighting the need for the pedagogy of care and understanding. Although this study does not aim to make any generalities, however, the researchers saw the need to understand and investigate the journey of the K-12 senior high school teachers, which are essential in providing lending ears about their transitioning experiences from the traditional classroom environment to emergency remote education. This study concludes with the implications of the findings that emerged and the direction for further research.

Keywords: Covid-19, distance education, emergency remote education, K-12 teachers, teaching modality

Highlights

What is already known about this topic:

- The Covid-19 pandemic disrupts the normal functioning of the world, especially in the educational setting. Thus, immediate alternative solutions must be made for the continuous delivery of the teaching and learning process.
- It is vital to take into account the expectations and roles of teachers because of the new instructional methods to deliver quality education during these unprecedented times.

What this paper contributes:

- This paper serves as a documentation of K-12 senior high school teachers' experiences and lessons learned during the emergency remote education. This may serve as a basis for educational sectors to take necessary actions to improve the delivery of distance education.
- The findings of this study reported three themes: getting the right mix of instructional methods, engaging in different open educational resources and information, and highlighting the need for the pedagogy of care and understanding.

Implications for theory, practice and/or policy:

- The findings of this study will help in facilitating educational policymakers to further enhance the delivery and implementation of emergency remote education and distance learning, specifically in the Philippine context.



Introduction

The Covid-19, a highly contagious disease, continuously disrupts the usual functioning of the world. In the meantime, private and public institutions' operations got suspended and urged to close. However, due to the socio-economic issues faced by the governments (Buheji et al., 2020; Nicola et al., 2020), such institutions are opted to open gradually per their contingency plans and safety precautions (Mohammed et al., 2020). Still, the government unceasingly tighten health protocols to slow down and somehow prevent its spread despite these resumptions.

Based on UNESCO's global monitoring of school closures caused by Covid-19, as of mid-September 2020, there are more than 800 million affected learners, and only 49.9 percent are the total enrolled learners worldwide. Further, there is still 52 country-wide closure (UNESCO, 2020). In the Philippines, the schools, universities, and colleges will remain close since there is still an absence of a reliable vaccine/cure. The learners will still not be allowed to come to school to keep safe from the public health emergency (Hodges et al., 2020). It puts the educational leaders to adapt any alternative solution to deal with the educational needs of the students even in the absence of face-to-face interaction (Danjou, 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020; Toquero, 2020a). As one of the primary recipients of this abrupt change, the teachers were required to adapt pedagogical changes given the migration of the conventional curriculum to the online-based curriculum (Basilaia, 2020; Toquero & Talidong, 2020).

Teachers struggle to adapt distance education, which may be attributed to their lack of experience, teaching beliefs, readiness, and proper training (Alvarez et al., 2019; Danjou, 2020; Farmer & West, 2019). While previous research already explored the impact of technology as a tool for learning (Al-Hariri et al., 2017; Alvarez et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2016; Hubalovsky, 2019; Tomaro & Muriarin, 2018), its advantages and disadvantages (Al Zumor et al., 2013; Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018; Rashid et al., 2020), further studies are necessary to understand deeply the effects of the sudden change of teaching modalities to teachers (Koehler & Farmer, 2020). The experiences and lessons learned of the K-12 teachers concerning the delivery of instruction in the absence of face-to-face are still in question. Thus, the purpose of this research is to identify the experiences and lessons learned of K-12 senior high school teachers during the health crisis brought by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Literature

Measures taken by educational institutions

Although distance education, blended learning, e-learning, homeschooling, and the likes have been widely used for several years now, this cannot just define the interruption of education in these trying times (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Thus, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is said to be a suitable term to use. Hodges et al. (2020) defined ERT as a non-permanent solution to emergencies to deliver the instruction to the students. The same sentiment was shared by Bozkurt & Sharma (2020) and Bozkurt et al. (2020).

Several research emerged to document the effects of the pandemic as to how educational institutions cope with this sudden transition (e.g., Alvarez, 2020; Basilaia, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Danjou, 2020; Dube, 2020; Quezada et al., 2020; Yanus, 2020). For instance, the result of a case study done in Georgia indicated a quick and successful transition to online-based education using Google Meet as the platform, which gained experiences that can be used in the future (Basilaia, 2020). Successful transition and feedback of students regarding online teaching method were also noted in the research of Danjou (2020), wherein he used video broadcasting posted on Facebook and live exchanges at Discord platform. Meanwhile, the study of Dube (2020) done in South Africa to rural learners creates a more challenging context. To illustrate, it emphasized the no to a poor internet connection, lack of devices and computer skills, and unequal distribution of learning resources. On the other hand, Santi et al. (2020) claimed that although teachers experienced challenges, they have the feeling that learning cannot be

interrupted, so they use their digital competencies and resources to attend to students' educational needs. Additionally, there were also some guides, frameworks, and reports published by international organizations to help the educational sectors (e.g., ILO, 2020; Reimers et al., 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020; UN, 2020; UNICEF, 2020). These give an idea that a new generation of laws, regulations, platforms, and solutions for future cases is one of the lessons learned from the pandemic 2020 (Basilaia, 2020).

In the Philippine context, wherein more than 300 thousand Covid-19 cases are identified as of mid-September 2020, it is problematic to drastically change the modalities of instruction given that the country is still a developing one (Alvarez, 2020; Nueva, 2019, Toquero, 2020b). The K-12 curriculum, for instance, has just been implemented in the year 2013 (Toquero, 2020b), and that the use of technology is not yet fully utilized, especially in remote areas (Tomaro & Mutiarin, 2018). Yet, the Department of Education (DepEd) urged to use and provide Self-Learning Modules (SLMs) with the alternative learning delivery modalities such as modular, television-based, radio-based instruction, blended, and online (DepEd, 2020). This leaves the educational stakeholders to act and respond quickly by migrating the conventional curriculum to online-based curriculum (Basilaia, 2020; Toquero & Talidong, 2020).

Covid-19 and the teachers

Considering that the educators were trained to teach the learners in a traditional mode of teaching and learning, however, due to the call for new modes of teaching, they have to adapt alternative ways since the world is still in a state of emergency and that education should still be delivered even in times of crisis. Considering that the global pandemic is a sudden concern, educational leaders and teachers need to act swiftly (Danjou, 2020; ILO, 2020) for the continuity of providing quality education to the students (Tria, 2020).

Since then, distance education, e-learning, and remote learning have been explored in terms of their effectiveness (Hubalovsky et al., 2019; Pradana & Amir, 2016) and challenges encountered by the teachers (Alahmari & Blankson, 2016; Awadhiya & Miglani, 2016; Farmer & West, 2019). For example, the study of Alahmari and Blankson (2016) explored the use of LMS in pilot schools and revealed that teachers have positive attitudes towards its implementation in their classrooms. Furthermore, the challenges encountered include the availability of resources and technology training and time. Although teaching remotely has seen its effectiveness in the previous years, there is a new level of challenges faced by the teachers due to the pandemic crisis. Recent researchers found that teachers were continuously challenged to practice teaching remotely amidst the pandemic situation (Alea et al., 2020; Santi et al., 2020). Even though teachers have shown a positive outlook during the pandemic crisis, they are still susceptible to anxiety (Talidong & Toquero, 2020).

Hence, it is vital to take into account the change of roles and expectations of teachers because of the new instructional methods to deliver quality education during these unprecedented times. The documentation of teachers' experiences and lessons learned, therefore, should be explored to deeply understand their positions (Koehler & Farmer, 2020). Thus, this study is conducted to explore the K-12 senior high school teachers' experiences and lessons learned who are engaged in emergency remote education. This may contribute to the pool of research that may be useful for future references during a state of emergencies. It aims to address the general research question, what are the K-12 senior high school experiences and lessons learned during emergency remote education?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study research design (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). Case study researchers like Stake (2000) and Yin (2009) explained that a case study design captures the notion of exploring a particular event that is bounded by time and/or locale. To illustrate, this research reflects the cases of five K-12 teachers in a particular school in the Philippines highlighting the lessons they have learned from ERT during the first half of the school year 2020-2021.

Further, the use of case study served as an approach to investigate the participants' experiences within a bounded system, thus, allowing a deeper understanding of the case they have experienced from traditional teaching to learning at a distance (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2014).

Participants and Locale

This study was conducted during the time of the Covid-19 crisis where nationwide quarantine measures in the Philippines were in place. All schools in the country shifted to emergency remote education since the government prohibited face-to-face classroom instructions.

From these aspects, the five K-12 teachers involved in this study were purposively selected (Maxwell, 2008). They are currently teaching in one of the K-12 schools in the Philippines. Moreover, the participants were contacted through an online platform, such as messenger, zoom, and MS teams. At first, there were around eight participants who showed their interests. However, three of them backed out due to unforeseen circumstances. Meanwhile, the majority of the participants taught in the said school for almost 2-3 years, shared that this was their first time to teach in a fully distance teaching approach. Although they also reiterated that before emergency remote teaching, they were using online platforms, which were limited to students' output submissions.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

A preliminary meeting has been undertaken with five K-12 teachers explaining to them the overview, purpose, and flow of the data collection process. Since there was a restriction to physical interactions, the researchers utilized various communication tools such as messenger and video-conferencing apps to reach them despite the distance.

To establish rapport and get their trust, the researchers lessen the communication gap by addressing their questions promptly and talking about their concerns (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Doody & Noonan, 2013). The researchers explained to them that their identity will be anonymized, such as naming the participant as "participant 1" or "P1", to ensure privacy and ethical considerations (Kaiser, 2009). Furthermore, the researchers asked for the consent of the participants to record the interview sessions. Thus, an informed consent form was secured before the individual interviews.

The researchers utilized the semi-structured interview in collecting the data. This research instrument was revised based on the suggestions of the experts in the field to ensure its validity. The researchers were able to acquire relevant information from the participants' experiences on the lessons they have learned from teaching at a distance in this time of pandemic crisis using a video-conferencing app and semi-structured interview. The use of individual interviews served as an approach for collecting rich and focused data reflecting the participants' thoughts and insights (Gaskell, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1987; Sonesson et al., 2018).

There were also follow-up inquiries in the form of online chat messaging, which helped ensure data saturation and deepening of the shared information of the participants (Boyatzis, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln,

2000). All information was kept confidential and stored in a password-protected computer file. Afterward, the raw data was erased once it was transcribed and evaluated, as agreed and part of the participants' ethical considerations agreement.

Data analysis

From the transcribed data, the researchers engaged in getting intimate with all the information through reading and re-reading the transcripts (Esterberg, 2002). In this way, the researchers were able to familiarize themselves with the transcriptions, hence, it helped them organize the thoughts and ideas presented and shared by the participants. Likewise, to better visualize the transcripts and facilitate an organized way of coding process the researchers transferred the data to MS Excel.

Using Saldaña's (2009) descriptive coding process, the researcher facilitated in coming up with initial codes. These codes were presented back to the participants in the form of member checking to confirm their responses and collect feedback, which also served as an opportunity to improve the trustworthiness of the study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002).

Table 1: Summary of initial codes and themes

Theme	Initial codes	Sample Responses
Getting the right mix of instructional methods	Flexible teaching approach	"Since not all students have quality access to internet, I make sure to deliver as well our lessons via offline mode, so other students have the chance to comply with the requirements." (P1) "I see to it that more than delivering the lessons via synchronous way, there is also room for asynchronous teaching to address the needs of other students as well..." (P3)
	Interactive teaching-learning activities	"Interests are important even in distance learning...that's why I provide them various learning tasks which they can choose what assessments they want to accomplish." (P4)
	Collaborative teaching-learning activities	"I still provide group activities like group oral presentations to boost their classroom interests even in this time of the pandemic crisis..." (P5)
Engaging in various open education resources and information	Utilization of curated instructional materials	"...I was able to reuse and revise curated learning materials from reputable online sources." (P2) "This pandemic gave me a realization and an opportunity to maximize the available online learning resources such as online videos as part of my distance teaching." (P3)
	Learning to adapt from online learning resources	"...I only know are more about text materials and YouTube videos...the context of remote teaching helped me to see and realize that there's more to learn when you maximize openness in learning." (P5)
Pedagogy of care and understanding	Emphatic teaching approach	"Listening to the stories and struggles of my students are really important especially in this time of uncertainty." (P1)
	Parent-like approach	"...I realized in my remote teaching experiences is the need to show to my students that I am still here for them regardless of distance...[it] should be combined with compassion because we are their second parents." (P3)

Afterward, the initial codes were reanalyzed based on the member checking feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002) and refined these codes into categories using focused coding (Saldaña, 2009). These categories were presented through peer checking, such as peer researchers, to gather their feedback and helped in refining towards coming up with a set of themes (Elliot et al., 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Findings

The first theme that emerged from this study highlights the notion of getting the *right mix of instructional methods*. This means that K-12 teachers were immersive in using a variety of instructional delivery approaches in addressing the needs of the students. For instance, P1 recognized the need to employ a combination of synchronous and asynchronous instructions to cater to the majority of the students, to wit:

“In [a] face-to-face classroom, we usually converse with our students with different strategies in assessing their performance, right? I believe, [the] same goes with remote instruction, that there is a need for [a] variety of assessment strategies. That’s why in my class, for example, my strategy was to deliver this particular topic via synchronous. Then, most of the activities would be worked offline at their own convenience.” (P1)

At the same time, the presence of the digital divide in the Philippines served as a realization for P4 and P5 to explore the uniqueness of emergency remote education context in delivering the lessons and activities and by not simply relying on a single method of instruction.

“I usually prepare my lessons and deliver these either in real-time class or upload the activities. I do not simply rely on [a] synchronous model of instruction since the problem of [the] internet connection is widely experienced by students and teachers as well. I observe that having different learning activities and choices made the students more interactive and compliant.” (P4)

“Many senior high school students are looking for collaborative activities even in remote classes. Since face-to-face is still prohibited, I provide my students [with] the opportunity to explore alternative ways with regard to group activities and presentation. Usually, I give them offline activities to work on their outputs. And I am truly impressed [by] the way they deliver their outputs. It was like a nostalgia of face-to-face teaching.” (P5)

Additionally, the second theme talks about the importance of *engaging in various open education resources and information*. This discusses the lessons learned of K-12 teachers to explore more on various learning materials and resources which are available in the online community of networks. In this way, it paved the way for P2 and P3 to utilize the openness of a wide array of educational resources.

“I realized that there are more ways to maximize my teaching resources. For instance, I was able to reuse and revise curated learning materials from reputable online sources. In this way, it gave me an opportunity to share this information to my class.” (P2)

“Although we have modules to follow, most of our instructional materials are adapted from different learning materials available online. These teaching practices, especially in this time of the pandemic crisis, really helped us to get the mix right with the courses we are handling.” (P3)

Likewise, P5 acknowledged that aside from the created materials they used for emergency remote teaching, the use of curated materials also served as an intervention to make the teaching and learning environment more engaging and participatory.

“While some of the content materials were created by us, however, we were also encouraged to see the benefits of searching for [a] variety of learning materials in the online community. Before, what I only know are more about text materials and YouTube videos. But, the context of remote teaching helped me to see and realize that there’s more to learn when you maximize openness in learning. Through this, I have maximized

the time in adapting online curated materials and combine these with the materials we created. I believe the students were more participative and interactive based from my remote classroom experiences.” (P5)

The last theme that was reported talks about the idea of the *pedagogy of care and understanding* in this time of the pandemic crisis. Since the effect of the pandemic crisis brought different levels of difficulties, the participants recognized and reflected on the essentiality of dealing with empathy to their students. P3 expressed his thoughts:

“We have more problems nowadays. So, one thing I realized in my remote teaching experiences is the need to show to my students that I am still here for them regardless of distance. I also make sure that submission bins are always open so that my students can have the freedom to accomplish the tasks. Although there were times that I employed deadlines, but most of the time if they asked for extensions, I always do it for them. At the end of the day, I think teaching should be combined with compassion because we are their second parents.” (P3)

They also saw the importance of lending their ears and showing their act of becoming their second parent even at a distance. In this way, it served as a turning point for P1 and P4 to transform from being a pragmatic educator to an empathic teacher.

“You know, there were times that my students asked me if they can miss the class because of financial problems in synchronous class. From being a strict senior high school teacher in [the] traditional classroom, I have learned to understand the stories of my students, especially that a lot of Filipino families are experiencing difficulties in their daily lives. So as their teacher, I have to show them that despite being apart, I am still with them and willing to listen either in online or offline mode.” (P1)

“Before I am very strict with the attendance and classroom participation of my students. But with the current situation, I have realized that I must also adjust and learn to show empathy to my students. We do not know if they are experiencing difficulty. You know, I, myself, am also experiencing stress and anxiety. What more of these young adults? As much as possible, before that start of our synchronous discussion, we a lot at least five minutes for chit-chat to release our stress.” (P4)

Discussion

The effect of Covid-19 in the Philippine education setting has been impactful as it was first expected (Cahapay, 2020; Cuaton, 2020; Toquero, 2020). While other countries around the globe are moving towards easing socio-economic restrictions, the Philippines cannot simply take the risk of allowing its people to physically interact, thus, the government imposed several quarantine measures to contain the spread of the virus (Pastor, 2020; Talidong, & Toquero, 2020).

One of which is the continued implementation of emergency remote education. Based on research findings, despite coming from traditional face-to-face teaching and learning experiences, K-12 senior high school teachers were still able to maximize different ways of employing instructions which were not limited to synchronous discussions but a combination of various strategies. Mahmood (2020) introduced different instructional strategies such as voice and pitch management, recording online lectures and providing self-learning material, flexible teaching and assessment policies, etc. that provides alternative approaches where students were not simply treated as one-size-fits-all, however, their uniqueness and the current context of the learning environment are being taken into consideration.

Also, while the country continuously aims to improve its infrastructure services, such as in the area of network and internet services, it is still evident that a large number of population, especially the in far-flung areas, are experiencing scarce resources in the internet connection (Alvarez, 2021; Roberts & Hernandez, 2019; Vera & Bresnahan, 2017). From the participants' shared experiences, they felt the need to consider the aspects of the digital divide (Alvarez, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Milakovich & Wise, 2019; Van Dijk, 2017), as they are also experiencing the same dilemma. The finding corroborates with Toquero et al. (2021) and Rotas and Cahapay (2020), wherein the Philippines encountered digital division upon emergency remote education implementation. Interestingly, even though this was the first time they engaged in fully teaching at a distance, they have learned to treat the online platform like a real classroom where a variety of learning activities can also be implemented. It reflects their dedication to ensuring active teacher-student interaction regardless of time and space.

Additionally, since instructional approaches are geared towards emergency remote education (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020), the K-12 teachers saw this as an opportunity to maximize their engagement to the use of different open educational resources (Affouneh, & Khlaif, 2020; de los Arcos et al., 2016; Tang et al., 2020). Although their institution requested them to create modules, the participants claimed that curated information was also utilized from the wideness of the available resources on the internet. This also allows them to reconnect and adapt to new information, allowing them to blend the appropriate resources for their lesson. Needless to say, their engagement to open education practices paved the way to utilize a variety of learning resources. Hence, it facilitates interactive teaching and learning engagement at a distance. Bond (2020) also reported different instructional tools that the teachers used during the pandemic crisis making distance education possible.

More importantly, in this time of the pandemic crisis, the teachers have learned that they are not just cognitive and skills facilitators, but they also acknowledge the need for students to be treated with care and understanding (Alvarez, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Robinson et al., 2020). It is for a fact that all of us are experiencing psychological impacts, such as anxiety, trauma, and depression, which are caused by the pandemic crisis. Thus, teachers may also consider the use of pandemic pedagogy, wherein it centers care and empathy-oriented human pedagogies (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021). This result supports the reflexive essay of Mehrotra (2021) wherein she centers the pedagogy of care during a pandemic crisis.

No one knows what the students are going through in these challenging times. Some might be thinking of ways to financially survive the remote learning classes since the unemployment rate in the country is on the rise, while others are still in the adjustment phase in the new normal of teaching and learning environment. Therefore, as teachers and second parents, these realizations serve as an awakening call that pedagogical approaches should embody with care, understanding, and trauma-informed pedagogy.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Although the outcome of this study cannot be generalized, it aims to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of selected K-12 senior high school teachers in the Philippines who were exposed to emergency remote teaching. The participants' experiences revealed that regardless of the instructional modality used, the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of the students require prompt attention and action to ensure students' active and participatory engagement in the learning environment. Thus, it is suggested that teachers should recognize student's uniqueness and utilize instructional modalities that caters students' different learning styles.

At the same time, the increasing effect of remote teaching and learning paved the way for acknowledging the importance of open education resources in the country. These lessons served as an eye-opener for

Filipino educators to imbibe the beauty of maximizing open education practices that can contribute to learning opportunities for all. With this, it is suggested that teachers should explore and be open to more open educational resources such as online learning tools that that would engage the student in distance education. This enables the teacher also to deliver the education despite the distance. Furthermore, it is recommended that educational institutions should implement policies and provide training for teachers with regards to open education resources.

Interestingly, while the participants see learning outcomes as attaining cognitive and skills learning, it is also noteworthy to understand the feelings and psychological behavior of students who are culturally raised in face-to-face teaching and learning environment. Therefore, it is highly recommended for teachers to show care, compassion, and understanding to make the pedestal of learning at a distance holistic.

This study is limited only to the perceptions of five K-12 teachers that covers their experiences and lesson learned during the emergency remote education. The study does not aim to generalize, thus, it is recommended also for future researchers to conduct a study that focuses on student experiences to deeply understand their learning journey in the time of emergency remote education. Future researchers may also consider to explore different teaching modalities and teaching tools that would be a great help in the teaching and learning during unforeseen circumstances such as Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

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