



THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) IN THE NEW NORMAL

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on the lived experiences of English teachers in Online Distance Learning (ODL) in the new normal. The study aimed to determine the degree of the pre-identified challenges and their feelings about teaching through ODL. The participants of this study involved five (5) Junior High School English teachers of the Basic Education Department (BED) in private schools in Laguna, Philippines in this first school year under the new normal, the SY 2020-2021. The study employed quantitative and qualitative research methods. The researcher obtained the mean from the raw data of the pre-identified challenges in teaching English through ODL in three (3) aspects: preparations, conduct of lessons, and assessment and feedback. The results revealed that the participants, being in ODL modality for almost a year now, found preparations very easy, having a mean of 3.40. Consequently, they considered that in the other two (2) aspects, they did not find much difficulty with 3.00 as the mean as the school year ended. These results showed that the participants have a low degree of difficulty in the pre-determined challenges as experienced in the ODL. This is due to their adjustment for a year now being first time-teachers in this new normal. As for the qualitative results, the hermeneutic phenomenology was used to identify their feelings about their teaching through ODL. Eight (8) themes emerged about their feelings in the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. At the beginning of the school year, the teachers had feelings of anxiety and challenge. In the middle of the school year, they had feelings of inefficiency and stress. However, they also felt hopeful that this pandemic would soon be over. Lastly, at the end of the school year, the teachers concluded their first school year in ODL with the feelings of fulfillment, confidence, and resilience.

KEYWORDS: *Online Distance Learning, English, lived experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

The education sector is widely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of the lockdowns it brought. School institutions shut all across the world, and globally, over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom (Lalani & Li, 2020). Schools and universities have not faced this level of disruption in generations, but there is still the ability to continue education even when schools close. In the Philippine context, as per Department of Education (DepEd) Secretary Leonor Briones, amidst the COVID-19 crisis,

the call remains the same, the education must continue whether face-to-face or virtual, with or without physically going to school.

With this, the 'new normal' of education is introduced, focusing on the mode of the instruction delivery with the remarkable rise of online learning. Since the conducting of face-to-face classes is prohibited, the DepEd announced that the adoption of various learning delivery options such as blended learning, distance learning, homeschooling, and other modes of delivery should be implemented depending



on the local COVID Risk Severity Classification and compliance with minimum health standards (Briones, 2020). The government schools in the Philippines have utilized the modular approach, and most of the private schools have utilized online teaching among the students. As the teachers and students venture into today's technological world, the internet has been leveraged, and it has offered the students a more personalized learning experience.

Horn and Stalker (2010) define online learning as the education that encompasses the delivery of content and instruction through the internet and provides interaction between learners and teachers. The learners are given the responsibility to control their place, time, direction, and pace of learning. Online learning is a type of distance learning that relies on the Internet for teacher and student interaction and the distribution of class materials. Most of the teachers utilize the platforms such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, Zoom, FB messenger, Google Meet, We Chat, Schoology, and Moodle (Chua, Miranda, Moreno, Palmario, Sibbaluca, & Solon, 2020).

Different schools, in having their online classes, employ these platforms to sustain the delivery of instruction and teaching in various subjects, especially English, which is considered one of the major subjects taught to the students in Basic Education. English has a unique place in the Philippine education system, and retaining its high standards is critically important for its economy and future development (Cabigon, 2015). However, as everybody is subjected to the new normal of education today, the fully online learning platform came as a surprise to the English teachers and all educators and students. This online teaching and learning have required careful planning, preparation, instruction delivery, assessment, commitment, and expertise, not just for the teachers but also for enabling and support systems (Lagua, 2018).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to determine the degree of pre-identified challenges in teaching English through online distance learning (ODL) as experienced by the English teachers and to examine their lived experiences with their feelings in teaching through the said modality in the new normal. It further aimed to

discover insights that can be shared by the respondents with their colleagues.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized qualitative and quantitative research methods. As widely accepted, the researcher used the descriptive method of research in this study to assess and describe the degree or level of pre-identified challenges in teaching English through ODL as experienced by the participants. Moreover, the researcher considered phenomenology, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, as the research design. This is also known as interpretive phenomenology, originated from Martin Heidegger which studies peoples' narratives, rooted in interpretation of the experiences and phenomena of the individuals' lifeworld which in this study is the ODL. Teachers' feelings are understood as to how they experience certain moments and live through particular phenomena connected with their experiences (van Manen, 2015 in Philipsen, Tondeur, Pynoo, Vanslambrouck, & Zhu, 2019).

The participants of this study involve 5 Junior High School English teachers of the Basic Education Department (BED) of different private schools in Laguna, Philippines. The researcher uses purposive sampling in identifying the English teachers as the respondents of the study. A sampling of 5 participants is considered an appropriate sample size for hermeneutic phenomenology (De Gagne & Walters, 2010 cited by Philipsen et al., 2019). As the study employed mixed methods, several instruments were used. First, the data was obtained using a self-made survey questionnaire with the 4-point Likert Scale. This was used for it gathers data faster than any other methods, and since society is still facing the pandemic, it was coursed online via Google Forms. Secondly, aside from the survey, the researcher formulated questions for the completion of a reflective writing among the participants and conducting of online interview to better obtain their feelings in teaching English through ODL. As for the statistical treatment of data, the researchers obtained the mean of the survey results among the teacher-participants. The scale below was used to obtain and classify the difficulty level of the challenges being experienced in ODL.

**Table 1. Scale and Verbal Interpretation**

Range	Verbal Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Very Easy
2.51-3.25	Easy
1.76-2.50	Difficult
1.00-1.75	Very Difficult

As for the qualitative treatment of data, the responses were transcribed by the researcher, and a thematic analysis was performed. The selective approach in the thematic analysis was used to identify which phrases or statements are considered to reflect the phenomenon being examined. The coding and generating of themes were also performed. Final identification of the themes was made by rereading the transcripts to verify that the themes were explicitly reflected and compatible with the participants' words or responses.

RESULTS

Degree of the Pre-Identified Challenges in Teaching English through ODL

The researcher obtained the mean from the raw data of the pre-identified challenges in teaching English through Online Distance Learning in three (3) aspects: preparations, the conduct of lessons, and assessment and feedback. The participants completed a survey designed to divulge the challenges that teachers meet relative to each aspect of ODL and their level of ease and difficulty.

Table 2 presents the mean scores obtained from the pre-identified challenges in teaching English as experienced by the participants in the new modality.

Table 2. Degree of the Pre-identified Challenges in Teaching English through ODL

Aspects of Teaching	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Preparations	3.40	Very Easy
Conduct of Lessons	3.00	Easy
Assessment and Feedback	3.00	Easy

As shown in Table 2, the participants, being in ODL modality for almost a year now, found the aspect of preparations very easy as registered by the mean of 3.40. They agreed that they did not find much difficulty on the other two (2) aspects, the conduct of lessons and the assessment and feedback, as recorded by the mean of 3.00 as the school year ended. It can be concluded that most of the teacher participants have grasped the practices that they have been into, i.e., from the preparations of the lessons, which involve creating their plans and dealing with technology up to the actual conduct of classes and the assessment of their students' performance and outputs under ODL modality. They have grasped how their LMS and their platform for synchronous classes work and how they deal with the students online. Also, they have collected teaching resources and some interactive platforms that they could use for the next school year.

These results are supported by the self-efficacy theory of Bandura (1977), with one of its four primary sources of influence known in developing self-efficacy, which is the mastery experiences. Garrido (2020) posits that the mastery experiences by Bandura are considered as the most influential source of efficacy

because they provide the most authentic evidence among people that to learn a new skill or to improve one's performance in a given activity, practice is needed. The new practices and the overcoming the difficulties that go with them under a certain period are what the individuals help them succeed.

The interpreted quantitative results acknowledged that the English teachers have a low degree of difficulty in the pre-determined challenges presented as experienced by them in the ODL. This may be due to their adjustment for a year now being first time-teachers under the modality in this new normal. These interpreted quantitative results are explained in detail through the qualitative data in the succeeding sections. The qualitative interpretative data elucidate information that gives more light to the results obtained in the quantitative method.

English Teachers' Feelings about the New Normal through Online Distance Teaching

The five (5) participants in the study are named as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5. Three (3) of them are in their 3-4 years of teaching. Two (2) of them are in their 8-10 years of teaching. The number of students



they handle in class is ranging from 30-41. Most of them teach English twice a week with 60 minutes per meeting. Only one teaches English once a week. LEAF LMS by KLEAFS Publishing, Genyo E-Learning by DIWA, and G-Suite are the LMS used by the participants.

The researcher had come up with eight (8) feelings as themes in this study. Furthermore, these eight (8) themes are further divided into three (3): feelings in the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

Essential Theme 1: Feeling of Anxiety. The participants had this feeling at the beginning of the school year as all have been new to this unprecedented situation brought by the pandemic. Most of the participants responded that they were nervous on the first day of classes due to the new setup of teaching and learning in this new normal. Without proper training on the technicalities and constant preparations emotionally, mentally, physically, it would be hard for the teachers to be immersed in this new environment of teaching.

This result about the participants' feelings of anxiety towards the setup and technology obtained through their cited experiences is parallel to the study of Cuenca and Angoya (2019) as the challenges in technical aspects ranked as one of the top 3 in their study about the challenges in English Online Teaching in the Philippines. Moreover, this can be classified as what Kebritchi, Santiago, and Lipschuetz (2017) have plotted on their framework of online courses issues and challenges, particularly the changing faculty role and the transitioning from face-to-face to online. The teacher's role changes from being a "performer" in the face-to-face class to a "guide" who must make adjustments to content delivery based on their setup. The participants have encountered this problem of dealing with the technicalities as they transfer what they once taught in the actual classroom to online. Consequently, Kebritchi et al. (2017) suggested that there is a need for online teachers to be comfortable with the technology and how to use it to be successful. Thus, there is a necessity to provide sufficient training for teachers on the most current technologies as well as engaging them in the development of their synchronous classes.

Essential Theme 2: Feeling of Challenge. The participants felt challenged in the aspect of preparation and conduct of lessons. Three (3) of the participants, P1, P2, and P4, were making modules as their plans in teaching, while the other 2, P3 and P5, were making their regular lesson plans. Three (3) of them found making the plan easy. However, these 3

teachers had the same sentiment on its implementation or integration in class. They all pointed out that what challenges them in the preparation is execution since it is far different from face-to-face class. The work of creating new materials or adjusting the activities from face-to-face classes to an online setup can be very challenging (Li & Irby, 2008 as cited by Kebritchi et al., 2017). The challenge can also be rooted in teachers' difficulty seamlessly transferring their face-to-face lessons to the online setup (Choi & Park, 2006 as cited by Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Essential Theme 3: Feeling of Inefficiency. The next theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the feeling of inefficiency which they had in the middle of the school year. All of them came to a point when each of them questioned their own efficiency and performance in teaching in this new normal. Questions such as "*Am I effective? Am I really imparting something to my students? Did I teach the lesson well? What or Where else did I lack? Am I doing it right? Am I teaching it correct? How come my students are like that at the moment?*" indicated the participants' feeling of inefficiency among themselves as they conduct classes online encountering the challenges on the delivery of the lesson, motivating the students participate, dealing with the pandemic situation, etc. Many teachers struggle with the delivery of the content and engagement of their students because of the lack of personal and face-to-face contact with them (Crawley, Fewell, & Sugar, 2009 in Kebritchi et al., 2017). Thus, there is a feeling among teachers of insufficiency and less control over how to deal with their synchronous classes well.

Essential Theme 4: Feeling of Stress. As the participants continued to deal with the new modality, stress also occurred among them. The teachers' feeling of stress had its overlying causes such as having many workloads, preparing, checking outputs, assessing students' academic honesty, and dealing with the schedule affected by technicalities. All of the participants articulated that the many workloads that they have made them stressful. When asked about their thought of discontinuing teaching because of the current situation, three (3) of them, P1, P2, and P3, affirmed that they somehow wanted to stop and try a new career. This was mainly because of the stress that they were experiencing. In face-to-face classes, generally, teachers have several workloads; however, in this new modality of ODL, the participants emphasized that a double or even triple time and effort must be exerted since they are into a new learning environment and are not yet used to this. Since there is a need to prepare for the students' instruction and activities, the



tendency is that the teachers will look for other times to check the outputs. Instead of having their time after teaching or after preparation as their resting period, they spend it checking. It takes teachers two times as long to prepare and teach online than face-to-face; thus, spending more time per student to facilitate the class (Cavanaugh, 2005 in Kebritchi et al., 2017).

Essential Theme 5: Feeling of Hope.

Despite the abovementioned negative feelings by the participants in the middle of the school year, they were all feeling hopeful to go back to face-to-face classes. With the challenges in teaching through ODL, all the teachers keep this hope that this pandemic would end soon, and they would meet and teach once again the students in school. Moreover, one of the reasons they hope to get back to face-to-face classes is their connection with the students. Most of them emphasized that it is the connection with the learners that is vital in the teaching and learning process. The changing role of educator also impacts the connection between them and the students. In a face-to-face classroom, the teachers take their cues from students' verbal and non-verbal interactions in the classroom (Coppola et al., 2001 in Kebritchi et al., 2017). It is difficult to take these affective cues when the teacher cannot see their learners' faces. Thus, some teachers may find the online environment cold and distant from students due to the virtual connection between them and how best to deliver their lessons in synchronous class. They wanted to make them feel that they are taught in school and are also assisted, appreciated, and loved by the teachers.

Essential Theme 6: Feeling of Fulfillment.

At the end of the school year, a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction was felt by all the teachers as they took part in this new modality despite the challenges it brought. They were fulfilled with the students with their appreciation, participation, and achievement. Moreover, one participant also expressed the sense of fulfillment through having a constant relationship with the parents. Norman (2020) stated that a strong teacher and parent collaboration leads to the development of children to have healthy study habits, better social skills, and better adaptability. Another source of their feeling of fulfillment in surviving ODL is with the help of their colleagues. This is parallel with Bandura's vicarious experience and social persuasion as sources of self-efficacy. According to the theory, seeing individuals similar to themselves succeed by sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed.

Essential Theme 7: Feeling of Confidence.

The participants felt confident with the setup and technicalities after experiencing and overcoming all the

challenges and the negative feelings brought by the ODL modality. All the participants expressed that they have adjusted from being nervous, struggling, stressed, etc. By getting used to the system for a year and by the challenges that they experienced in the aspects such as preparing lessons, conducting classes, and assessing the students and their work, they have been equipped with the system, with the resources, and with establishing relationships with the students. They have now grasped the situation itself, known their strength and the ways on how to deal with the difficulty of the modality. This feeling based on the participants' experiences was highlighted by Bandura's mastery experiences in his self-efficacy theory. Surviving an experience, such as mastering a task or taking part in a specific phenomenon, will enhance self-belief in that area, whereas a failure will weaken that efficacy belief (Akthar, 2008).

Essential Theme 8: Feeling of Resiliency.

The last theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the feeling of resiliency. With the negative things brought about by this pandemic, the participants felt resiliency through the things they have realized based on their lived experiences and by choosing to continue by taking care of themselves. Naidu (2021) described resilience as not an uncommon commodity. It is the sum of passion and perseverance. This kind of resilience among school institutions and teachers is developed and enhanced through direct actions in the distance learning modality. The teachers emerged victorious though it was difficult to bear the new teaching practices in this new normal. The participants stressed the importance of taking care of oneself and one's mental health to hurdle the challenges brought about by this extraordinary situation. McCarthy (2020) emphasized the importance of self-care. Setting boundaries that separate work time from personal time is one of the first steps. When one becomes mentally exhausted, overtired, or drained of energy, there is a possibility to have a complete shutdown mentally or physically, and at that point, no tasks will get done. On the other hand, some of the teacher-participants stated their concern to their students. Their experiences led them to be stronger as they increase their concerns to their students since everybody has been adjusting to this kind of setup. Most of what the teachers realized is for them to be able to continue to bear the challenges that this setup will still bring and for them also to help the students more.

CONCLUSION

With the findings, the study has drawn a conclusion that the teacher participants have grasped



the practices they have been doing from the online preparations in teaching, which involve creating their plans and dealing with technology to conduct synchronous classes and assess their students' performance and outputs under the ODL modality. Moreover, negative feelings in teaching emerged among the teachers at the beginning of the school year due to the new teaching and learning process. However, as time went by, because of the mastery of the practices undertaken using the technology, LMS, applications, and how to deal with the students, the teachers then had positive feelings towards the end of the school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The institution must consistently offer training for the teachers about technicalities and teaching strategies and formation concerning mental health. Moreover, feedback can be obtained from the students, teachers, and parents every end of the quarter or term to help the teachers evaluate their teaching strategies online. Also, this feedback can be of help to the administration if they need to improve their technical support.

The lived experiences of the learners under this first school year of the new normal can also be examined since they too are vital elements of the teaching and learning process. There might be several interesting points or themes that can emerge based on their viewpoints, perspectives, and experiences.

Aside from feelings, other aspects of the lived experiences of teachers, learners, and even admins can be explored further.

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