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Building online facilitating skills in the new normal

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Abstract

The sudden shift to remote teaching caused by COVID-19 pandemic has created a stressful and demanding context for teachers, specifically on the aspect of delivering remote instruction. This ascertained the challenges and opportunities encountered by 311 public basic education teachers attending different online training platforms and utilized the mixed method design in analyzing the data of the teachers' online facilitation skills and used the scanning method in the data collection process. The challenges and opportunities they encountered was conducted through an unstructured interview via Zoom. The researcher-made questionnaires were sent to the teachers via email. Results revealed that teachers already had prerequisite ICT skills so the use of technology during the online training was not so much a threat in the enhancement of their ICT knowledge and skills except of the issues regarding very slow internet access and the lack of necessary and proper equipment and gadgets. In conclusion, teachers easily adopted to the shift from in-person to remote teaching; enhanced their ICT skills; and became prepared for remote teaching. Despite the sudden shift, these teachers remained positive in pursuing the direction for digital literacy to build an effective and efficient skills in remote teaching in the new normal.

Keywords: Facilitation skills, new normal, online learning, remote teaching

Introduction

The COVID 19 pandemic has forced some private schools in the Philippines to close, upending conventional approach to teaching-learning and the entire education system. Sudden shift to remote teaching has created a stressful and demanding context for teachers not to mention the added responsibilities at home in the family. One major and specific concern is directed towards the teachers' well-being and their capabilities in successfully delivering remote instruction. What's more troubling is their differential access to technology and learning supports at home. This sudden shift to remote teaching created substantial challenges for teachers' work. Some are uncomfortable using technological tools required for teaching in their homes. Schools have seen this pressing concern and have

shown support in helping teachers develop a sense of success during this pandemic. Suddenly, teachers had to remodel and organize an online schedule to reach and teach their students.

Online teaching and learning is an educational activity which happens over the internet, an activity designed to provide students learning experiences even in remote locations (Hrastinski 2008; Moore et al. 2011; Singh and Thurman 2019; Watts 2016; Yilmaz 2019) as cited in Kim (2020). This online learning experience can be synchronous or asynchronous. In an asynchronous set up, the students will be learning and participating through different media tools such as e-mail or social media discussion boards in their chosen time while the synchronous set up, students must log in to participate in live audio and video conferencing and complete the learning activities with immediate feedback (Hrastinski, 2008).

Educational institutions in the Philippines have been employing traditional methods of learning (face-to-face) before the COVID-19 pandemic. The efficacy of the teacher in the use of technology is one predictor in the effectiveness of remote teaching and learning. Their attitude and skills in using technology could affect students' motivation and learning. Suddenly, the teachers have to make use of technology as a platform in the Learning Management System; in conducting online teaching quite different from they used technology in the traditional methods of teaching where technology only served as tools in showing pictures and videos, etc. Technology has become the bloodline of online teaching and learning (Kalogiannakis, 2010).

Distance and or location have been made possible through fast developments in technology. The terms; *online learning*, *open learning*, *web-based learning*, *computer-mediated learning*, *blended learning*, *m-learning* are all linked to the ability to use a computer connected to a network, that allows any student to learn remotely at anytime, anywhere, and in all means. (Cojocariu et al., 2014 as cited in Dhawan, 2020).

Online teaching activities rely greatly on the teacher's ability to manipulate technology to his or her advantage and also determine the successes and failures of the educational processes. Learning technological advancement is part of the Continuing Professional Development of teachers in the Philippines. The teachers knowledge, skills, and values that relate to the instructional tasks of Filipino teachers (Department of Education, 2017, p. 22) as cited in Bernardo, Wong-Fernandez, Macalaguino Jr, and Navarro (2020) is essential in the 21st century teaching and learning for this "domain specifies that the teacher values personal and professional reflection and learning to improve practice and also the importance of teachers' assuming responsibility for personal growth and professional development for lifelong learning". To ensure preparedness for online educational processes, teachers undergo several online ICT trainings and programs with the contention that the teaching skills of teachers have to be built and enhanced. With these online ICT trainings, they are expected to possess problem-solving skills such as having a control on their students' class participation, designing interesting and interactive learning experiences given the poor network infrastructure in the country and among others.

Conceptual framework

The impact on what is happening in the teaching field during the pandemic has been ascertained around the world. Owing to the fact that teaching field during this pandemic is mostly remote since the start of COVID-19 in March. Learners on the other hand feel less passionate about the integrity of their assigned tasks due to the lack of teacher to student face to face interaction. With the emergent shift to online or blended instructions unfolded by the current happenings, the educators and students alike sought to grapple the vast

alterations in the academe (Meyer 2020). The epidemic-related challenges to training, ethical decision making framing that may help mitigating these challenges thus resulting to the guiding and aspirational principles of the pandemic's impact on the teaching field roles and affiliated organizations (Goghari et.al 2020).

The suddenness of the pandemic and the huge burden it posed on the country's resources require a synchronized educational system. Understanding of the very nature of learning transformed the way the educational authorities define, strategize, and deliver instruction and this results in new modes of instructional delivery, new learning domains. Online instructional delivery become the platform of the teaching and learning process; a learning management system that is flexible and student-centred. It has provided more flexible access to content and training remotely at anytime. Learning experiences in a synchronous kind of environment allow students to be of someplace they can be and independently learn and interact with the teachers and other students (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Thus, introduced new learning processes and outcomes, and new educational roles and individuals. Asynchronous or synchronous online learning can be cost effective because it reduces travel and other costs required to attend in-person classes but still may provide learning opportunities for the students (Yilmaz, 2019).

With the new online setting, the teachers' need to set norms for commitment, such that the students recurrently inquires questions and collaborate to their peers that are different than the norms in the face to face setting. Resistance to change will not aid in any educative process. Teachers then must adapt to the modifications in a short period of time and their able to maintain the quality of education. It is how to behave and sustain the excellence of education amidst the crisis. It also showcases the adapting competencies as part of professionalism. The shift from in-person lectures to online lectures and or *e* learning became the only possible solution. Innovative solutions by the agencies or institutions can help the online facilitators succeed over the challenges posed by the pandemic (Liguori & Winkler, 2020). The encouragement to join webinars fully digitalized the current situation. Therefore, to address the current need in the educational system, series of quality enhancement through online training has increased exponentially influencing teachers to shift their pedagogical approach to undertake and adapt to the changing situations (Carey, 2020).

Whatever type of social networking platform the facilitators' opted, it is without uncertainty to reach out the diverse audiences to value the status online. To attract the interest of the students, teachers may take into deliberation the online teaching-learning features, virtual screen background, and systematic history, research boundaries and interesting online activities. It was found out that students performed very well in their assessments, when exposed to the established online platform and strategies (Xiao, C et.al 2020). The attitudes of the students are determined by the platform being provided by the educationalists. Teachers necessitate in improving the online skills in order for the students to use the platforms with ease, usefulness and accessibility in a wider context (Albashtawi & Al Bataineh, 2020). The conduct of teaching and learning activities using the online platform has become the new standard for teachers and students this time.

"COVID-19 has made institutions shift to online mode of pedagogy" (Dhawan, 2020). There are different platforms utilized by the teachers. Many countries including the Philippines shifted to online teaching via Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, google Meet, etc. in order to promote digital online education and bring back the normal teaching order (Chen, Peng, Yin, Rong, Yang & Cong, 2020).

There are numerous of technologies available in the online education, but sometimes can create chaos in the academic community. These are linked with technology variety from downloading errors, installation issues, problems in logging in, video and audio

compatibility and internet provider issues. The advantages attached to the adoption of online learning during crises should be focused but it should also take into the possibility of developing and enhancing the quality of virtual courses delivered in such predicaments (Affouneh et.al., 2020). The pedagogical and technical competencies of online teachers are of great significant. Consequently, pivotal for online learning success will be the rigorous quality management programs to prepare society for any similar crisis situations

Educational institutions are challenged not only in finding and using the new technology but also re-inventing education. Helping the teachers and the academic staff who are pursuing the direction for digital literacy and building effective and efficient teaching skills through online training in the new normal must be the top priority.

Determining the online facilitation skills of the teachers is essential to cater students' needs and potentials this time of pandemic. This will also help teachers and other school partners to identify the learning modalities that will improve student learning.

Research objectives

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the challenges and opportunities encountered by the basic education teachers during the online training using different online platforms. Specifically, this answers the following objectives:

1. Identify the different online platforms utilized during the training;
2. Determine the teachers' willingness and skills acquired during online training; and
3. Explore the challenges and opportunities encountered by the basic education teachers during the online training.

Methodology

Research design

This study utilized mixed method of quantitative and qualitative method. With the purpose of identifying the online platforms utilized by teachers in online facilitation and determining the challenges and opportunities encountered in enhancing their facilitation skills that may lead to differences, scanning method was used in the data collection process (Frankel & Wallen, 2009).

Respondents of the study

There were 311 public school teachers in basic education in the Philippines who participated in this study. They were purposely selected based on the purpose of the study and were also those identified to have attended webinars and online training in building online facilitating skills. Letters were sent to 50 public secondary schools requesting for 10 participants of the study. All the 50 schools approved to be part of this study but not all teachers returned the questionnaires. Questionnaires were sent via google forms.

Instrumentation

The research instruments utilized in the study was composed of two parts: checklist (Part I) and interview guide (Part II). The researchers prepared checklist and pilot tested it to the other teachers in the private schools. Researchers made questionnaires were sent to the teachers via email and messenger application. Unstructured interview was also conducted via zoom in order to identify the challenges encountered by the teachers.

Validation and reliability

The checklist was content validated by a group of experts in teacher education. There three (3) validators of the questionnaires. The questionnaire was validated to find out if the instrument would really draw out the responses desired to provide the needed data for this study and for the clarity of the purpose of the study.

The instrument gained an average content validity index of 0.93 means it has average content validity index. It was also pilot tested to thirty (30) private school teachers and it has 0.84 reliability coefficient which means the research instrument is reliable.

Data analysis

This present study used mixed methods that tend to fit more closely with qualitative worldviews (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), with the belief that there are multiple realities dependent upon the individual, but they answer questions by combining qualitative and quantitative methods in various ways, in parallel, concurrent, or sequential order". The use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology can build on the strengths and neutralize the limitations of either methodology used alone and provide for stronger inferences because the data are looked at from multiple perspectives (Pole, 2007).

The Microsoft Excel 2013 was used for statistical analyses. The results of the data became the basis of the researcher to propose an intervention material.

Findings and discussion

The following are the results of the study (please see Table 1) based on the gathered data in determining the challenges and opportunities encountered by the basic education teachers during the online training using different online platforms.

Online education platform during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dhawan, 2020) was given emphasis by teachers, students and school administrators. Because of the significant social impact of COVID-19, emotional problems at different levels and degree might be experiences by learners due to home isolation and a lot of other factors learners will have emotional problems at different levels due to the influence of home isolation and other factors, thus may affect effectiveness of online learning and cause digital stress. In this study, most of the teacher participants utilized zoom in training and even in online classes. It has a mean of 4.33, which means that zoom is always used by the teachers. "This platform allowed instructors to meet with students virtually and deliver lessons as synchronous instruction at the normally scheduled class times each week. Some classes were asynchronous, where students did lessons and assignments on their own, (Barry & Kanematsu, 2020). Teachers could mute students to prevent distracting background noise and screen views could be selected to show everyone at once or just the person talking.

Table 1. Online platforms used during the training

	Weighted Mean	Description
Zoom	4.33	Always
Google Meet	3.23	Sometimes
Microsoft Teams	3.29	Sometimes
Cisco WebEx	2.02	Rarely
Apache OpenMeeting	1.02	Never
<i>E-TURO</i>	3.21	Sometimes
RingCentral Video	1.0	Never
Team Viewer	1.0	Never
Pexip	1.0	Never
ezTalks Meetings	1.25	Never
Skype	3.38	Sometimes
join.me	2.00	Rarely

Legend:

1 – 1.80	Never
1.81 – 2.60	Rarely
2.61 – 3.40	Sometimes
3.41 - 4.20	Often
4.21 to 5.00	Always

Another important and useful platform is skype. This is also useful in teaching and learning. One teacher said, “*I like skype because I usually used it with our daily conversation with my family abroad, now it is used in training and online classes*”. This implies that skype can also be a good application for teaching and learning.

Microsoft Teams is also very useful. It has a mean score of 3.29, which is sometimes utilized by the teachers in training and in online classes. Barry and Kanematsu (2020), specify the use of Microsoft Teams and Zoom, were teachers are free to conduct their own laboratory activities for students and YouTube are used for videos and simulations”.

Other applications used are google meet and *E-TURO* which are also sometimes utilized in school. Distance education are offered not only for the students who cannot come to educational sites but also for teachers who need experience to engage children from various backgrounds without being bound by location” (Kim, 2020). While the Google classroom developed by Google offers a free web service for schools that aims to simplify creating, distributing, and grading assignments Okmawati (2020). Its primary purpose is to streamline the process of sharing files and even recording the meetings between teachers and students. Creating an online classroom area is part of the good interface in google classroom which allows one to manage all the documents uploaded for the students. Documents are stored on Google Drive and can be edited in Drive’s apps, such as Google Docs, Sheets, and so on.

Thus, this study found out that zoom, skype, e-turo, Microsoft teams and google meet are commonly utilized by the teachers. These applications are user friendly and helpful in teaching and learning.

Table 2. Teachers’ readiness and willingness in the online training.

	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I have a goal in attending online training.	3.52	Strongly Agree
2. I can learn from things I hear from the lectures, audio recordings, or podcasts.	3.0	Agree
3. I have to read further on topics discussed during the webinar.	3.2	Agree
4. I am willing to spend at least 10 hours a week attending on online lectures.	3.4	Strongly Agree
5. I am willing to use e-mail and other online tools to ask my co-teachers and facilitators of things related to the training.	3.51	Strongly Agree
TOTALITY	3.33	Strongly Agree

Legend:

1.0 – 1.75	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1.76 – 2.5	<i>Disagree</i>
2.51 – 3.25	<i>Agree</i>
3.26 – 4.0	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

The teachers were goal-oriented and work-focused on the online facilitation as revealed in the overall total of 3.33 (strongly agree) which could mean that these teachers already have hold responsibilities in the paradigm shift from the face to face classroom interaction to online distance learning. This revealed that attending online learning made them intellectualize the new scheme of the mode of delivery in the basic education. This study affirms the study of Gaboy, Mabalay, Mananghaya, Mercado and Romblon (2020) teachers' awareness of the use of different technologies and the suitability of teaching and learning content is important as well as utilizing ICT equipment and software utilization.

Torrau (2020) mention that “due to the Corona pandemic in 2020, these reflections on future developments quickly became a reality for many schools”. Schools and closing and teachers training were administered online. Teachers attended webinars with specific goals. A goal driven expert is essential on reaching the specific objective and in accomplishing the task in the online trainings that can produce impactful results in the career.

The table shows the teachers' experience during online training. The teachers were comfortable in the use of the online training platform and are knowledgeable in the use of technology as revealed in the overall total of 3.02 (agree) which could mean that these teachers already have a schema or a background knowledge on use of ICT for a remote and online distance learning but majority of them expressed difficulty in connection which might be cause by economic and material shortcomings. This sole issue on the lack of a strong internet connection or infrastructure could be a major in preventing teachers to build their online skills and deprived them of redesigning and recreating class activities; synchronous and asynchronous.

Table 3. Necessary skills developed by the teachers

	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I am comfortable surfing the internet	3.33	Strongly Agree
2. I am fairly good at using the computer.	3.11	Agree
3. I am comfortable conducting searches, setting bookmarks, and downloading files.	2.59	Agree
4. I am connected to the Internet with a fairly fast, reliable connection such as DSL or cable modem.	2.44	Disagree
5. I have headphones or speakers and a microphone to use if a class has a videoconference	3.62	Strongly Agree
TOTALITY	3.02	Agree

Legend:

1.0 – 1.75	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
1.76 – 2.5	<i>Disagree</i>
2.51 – 3.25	<i>Agree</i>
3.26 – 4.0	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

A strong and stable internet connection is required for teachers to be able to build and enhance their skills in teaching and learning through online trainings. Majority of the teachers (201/311) revealed that it is their first-hand experience to attend trainings and access the technology using Zoom Meeting. So using the platform made them aware the online protocols (Do's and Don'ts) of attending online trainings. It was a pronounced encounter that their school has not switched to the distance learning of education as teachers' viewed the basic modification of the style of delivery due to pandemic. Thus, online learning will become integral fragment to school practices. It is to note that that the online facilitators' maybe the person full of patience, care and kind identity in order to cater the learners' competencies and skills.

Attending the different online trainings equipped them with electronic presentation skills, web navigation abilities and integrating 21st century expertise. Majority of the online participants were prepared and made to implement the acquired skills in their own online platform.

Challenges and opportunities encountered by the teachers

The researchers conducted an informal interview with teachers thru messenger and video conferencing and the following themes emerged:

Theme 1: Monitoring students' progress

Monitoring the progress of the students is very challenging on the part of the teachers. In the study of Wong, Jumat, Lee, Foo, Goh, Ganapathy and Hwang (2020), it was mention that there are limitations of any online video-conferencing program especially if it is free because the student' participants that can be viewed on screen is limited. One of the teacher participants mentions that:

“In an online class, I find it difficult not only because I have low internet connection but I find it challenging during the evaluation of students' performance”. (P1)

“Determining student progress is an important role of every teacher. I cannot assure that my students are learning because online learning is new to new to them”. (P4)

“Monitoring student progresses are done online. Due to low internet connectivity, most of my students cannot accomplish the google form sent to them on that day” (P10)

This implies that determining student’s focused attention and full engagement is elusive can be very challenging even with the online platforms available. Majority of the teachers mentioned that access to technology was a great challenge adding the fact that the Philippines has a very unstable internet infrastructure makes digital competence even more challenging. Communication issues arise during synchronous classes because of intermittent internet signal.

Theme 2: Working from home requires a lot of work, yet rewarding

Working at home to majority of the participants who work from home suffered stress due to increased workload. Teachers believed that working from home requires a lot of work. While the teachers’ capability to secure gadgets and laptops, the participant became frustrated and depressed due to his/her inability to access to technology for economic reasons; balancing work and family demands is also a struggle. On the other hand, Boholano, Jamon, Jamon and Boholano (2021) cited that “webinar-based training can improve teachers’ skills and enhance their virtual teaching strategies in the absence of the face to face conferences”. Thus, working from home can be stressful and meaningful. Teachers are working from home and these are some of their narratives:

“Working from home is good because I can take care of my kids and also safe from the virus. But attending online class and webinars are very stressful because of my internet problem” (P5)

“Sometimes there are many overlapping meetings and webinars. It requires us to have two or more gadgets” (P11)

“Working from home is stressful, yet rewarding” (P8)

This implies that teachers feel that online training and webinars are stressful because of the overlapping schedule and infrastructure. Although they mention that they have learned a lot and they are productive during this pandemic. Although, the participants of the study described online teaching as extreme and intense activity, they also pointed out that it is sometimes rewarding.

Conclusions and recommendations

Basic education teachers’ resilient attitude towards their online training experience was evident. The series of online training have made teachers easily adopt to the shift from in-person to remote teaching; have helped enhanced their ICT skills; and prepared them for remote teaching despite the unstable internet connection caused by the country’s poor internet infrastructure and the lack of gadgets and other technological equipment and support for the teaching and learning activities.

Despite the sudden shift, these teachers remained positive in pursuing the direction for digital literacy to build and effective and efficient skills in remote teaching in the new normal and this in return calls for education and schools to be adoptive and adaptive to the

pressing, current and fast changing learning styles, modalities, and teaching infrastructure which could be foreseen to be highly digitalized in the very near future.

Further, this entails a high demand for teachers who are not only content and pedagogy experts but also technologically competent and multimedia experts to address the students and society's learning needs, demand, and platform.

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