Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Writing Online Amidst the Pandemic: Voices from English Language Teachers in Philippine Universities

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Abstract: With the sudden transition to online instruction in most educational institutions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be assumed that there is paucity in research as regards the teaching of writing online during this crisis moment. To address this niche, 13 Filipino university English language teachers were asked to participate in both online semi-structured and follow-up email interviews to describe their experiences in teaching writing online during the pandemic, particularly the challenges they faced, their coping strategies to address these challenges, and the opportunities in online teaching they valued. The interview responses revealed three major challenges in teaching writing online: technological concerns and equity issues, vague response of schools to emergency remote teaching, and problems in assessment. Three key strategies to cope with these challenges were found: flexibility in communicating with students and in accommodating their concerns, initiatives for professional development, and gaining support from colleagues and students. Despite the challenges of online instruction, two opportunities for development in online writing instruction were identified: optimizing the use of online-teaching platforms and resources, and enhancing one's reflective practice. Implications for teaching writing online in particular and for online learning and teacher education in general are discussed in the paper.

Introduction

Writing has remained as an essential activity across disciplines in higher education. In fact, learning to write in a specific discipline has become imperative for future professional writers to integrate into their academic, scientific, or professional community (Rakedzon & Baram-Tsabari, 2017). Although it has become a routine activity, writing is often described as the most challenging language skill to acquire (Hamp-Lyons & Heasley, 2006), compounded by issues such as genre, style, language, and writing instruction. At university, students often face a

variety of writing tasks, which "progressively become more complex and demanding" when the learners go farther in the academic program (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 1). Dysthe (2007) avers that writing "involves much more than being able to communicate what you already know. It is also an important tool for thinking, learning and knowledge creation" (p. 237). For this reason, several universities have enriched their curricula to include writing courses to help students analyse and produce knowledge, and communicate and publish their ideas.

The teaching of academic writing has often been outsourced to language teachers or specialists (Mostert & Townsend, 2016). As such, most previous studies on writing pedagogy have focused on English language teaching (ELT) contexts (Bitchener et al., 2017; McGrath & Kaufhold, 2016). Moreover, research on the teaching of writing online has been robust and significant. Previous studies have dealt with the use of virtual platforms, such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and online systems in the teaching and learning of academic writing (Kwak, 2017; Wijeyewardene et al., 2013; Yeh, 2015); approaches to online writing pedagogy such as the use of online writing flipped instruction (Wu et al., 2020), blended teaching for summary writing (Yang, 2014), and scaffolding English language learners for online writing collaborative activities (Such, 2021); and assessment and giving feedback in online writing instruction, e.g., improving essay writing and learning through online peer feedback (Delante, 2017; Latifi et al., 2021), online dynamic assessment using Google Docs (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2019), and using 'screencasting' to give feedback for academic writing (Bush, 2020). In terms of approaches to online writing instruction, for example, Such (2021) employed linguistic and directional scaffolding through wiki writing assignments that covered frequent word sequences for language support and specific writing instructions, which fostered interaction and collaboration among students. The findings indicated that despite providing scaffolding in collaboration and writing, the students still encountered challenges with participation via collaboration and focused on meaning negotiation instead of spelling and grammar. An example of an innovative assessment strategy, on the other hand, was utilised in Bush's (2021) study, which introduced 'screencasting' as a new method of giving feedback where the computer screen is video-captured while an audio-recording is being made. Through this, students receive oral feedback in connection with written corrective feedback (WCF). The results revealed that the students favourably perceive screencast feedback as more effective than WCF alone.

A watershed moment for online learning has arrived because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, teachers were asked, with no choice, to migrate, create, and implement online teaching—"the only option available for continuing education" (Todd, 2020, p. 5)—because of school closures even though some, if not most, of them did not feel prepared to do so, or formerly had relatively insignificant interest or insufficient training in online teaching (McMurtrie, 2020). In fact, surveys on teacher preparedness report the low level of preparedness at the onset of the pandemic (Scherer et al., 2021). These conditions bear significance and relevance to teacher education, both preservice and in-service. Because of the sudden shift from classroom to online teaching, little or limited framework or guidelines existed for online learning, and teachers worldwide were enforced to implement online-teaching methods at short notice. Also, as argued by Ugalingan et al. (2021), "traditional professional development programs for teacher preparation are not adequate in dealing with the conditions brought about by the pandemic" (p. 2). While several educational institutions across the globe are now gradually returning to face-to-face classes, it is possible that in the future, hybrid or blended mode of learning may be implemented, and teachers can capitalise from challenges and

opportunities of enforced online teaching and apply these learning experiences to their future teaching practices.

In the context of teaching writing online during the pandemic, very few studies have been conducted. For example, Macnaught and Yates's (2020) study reported on the creation of online writing workshops for postgraduate students using the software Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, which found five student participation types in synchronous writing instruction: (1) "observant," (2) "anonymous," (3) "episodic," (4) "concealed," and (5) "discursive" (pp. 95-98). In his attempt to integrate critical thinking in online language tasks for an academic-writing class, Loo (2020) reported on the use of different online tools to support an academic-writing module in a university in Singapore. He has found that critical-thinking activities can be adapted synchronously and asynchronously for online writing instruction through the use of various online tools (i.e., Zoom, Microsoft Office 365, and Luminus) intended for analytical processes, which support specific teaching principles employed for the deconstruction of texts and rhetorical functions. In the Philippine context, there is a lacuna in the literature that attempts to explore ELT teachers' experiences in teaching writing online during the pandemic. Thus, the present study aims to fill that gap.

With little to be learnt from previous studies, conducting research to understand the consequences of migrating from classroom to online learning becomes crucial to determine future directions that could contribute to successful online writing instruction. Some previous studies, which may be relevant to the pandemic situation, have identified weaknesses with online teaching. Baralt et al.'s (2016) study has found that with respect to student engagement, online language learning may be less effective than classroom learning. As a corollary to this, Tang (2019) has argued that face-to-face learning is more effective than online learning in teaching pragmatics. Conversely, online teaching provides opportunities for creative developments that could benefit education in the long run. The studies of Loo (2020), Tang et al. (2020), and Utami (2018) have found that online learning helps promote autonomy or independence among students. Utami (2018) reported that in the context of online learning, students independently use language-learning strategies such as searching credible online resources and managing their own learning pace or self-controlling over their learning.

Although the availability of technology can make the transition from classroom to online learning feasible, "appearances can be deceiving as online teaching remains a complex endeavor" (Dubreil, 2020, p. 251), especially among teachers. Therefore, research into the impact of the sudden shift to online learning is necessary to envision future pathways of ELT. According to Chapelle (2007), teacher judgements are essential in examining technological innovations in education. To address these concerns and to support ELT teachers in their unprecedented efforts in teaching writing online, then attention may be given to develop a robust means to explore the challenges and opportunities in online writing instruction in the context of crisis moments such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Implications from this investigation could trigger similar accounts and experiences related to teaching writing online, especially in developing countries. Also, lessons learned from experiences of enforced teaching of writing online can inform teacher education in post-pandemic times.

Against this background, the present study aims to investigate the challenges and opportunities in teaching writing online amidst the pandemic as experienced by English language teachers in Philippine universities. Specifically, the study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1.   What challenges do the ELT teachers face in teaching writing online during the pandemic?
2.   How do they cope with these challenges?
3.   What opportunities in teaching writing online do they value?

Method
Research Design

Given the objectives of the investigation, this qualitative study, which used a case-study approach, employed online semi-structured and follow-up email interviews to gather data. The interviews were conducted to explore ELT practitioners' experiences and views on the challenges and opportunities in teaching writing online amidst the pandemic.

Participants

The present study used nonprobability sampling, specifically purposive-convenience sampling. A group of 13 English language teachers (eight male, five female) from six state and seven private Philippine universities within the researchers' network voluntarily participated in the online interview. Only those who were teaching for at least five years in the college level and were handling the writing courses Academic Writing, Technical Writing, Research Writing, and Thesis Writing during the pandemic were asked to participate. Moreover, since the study was conducted amid the pandemic, only those who were available and had an online access for the semi-structured interview participated. At the time of the study, most of the teacher-participants had been teaching English for 11-15 years. All had ELT-related qualifications. Six had master's degrees, while seven held Ph.D. degrees. The participants likewise disclosed that before the opening of the school year and during the pandemic, they have undertaken relatively adequate online trainings on online teaching organised by their respective universities. Most of these teachers reported that they have somewhat sufficient knowledge and skills in online teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

To determine the feasibility of the present study, the researchers facilitated a preliminary, informal interview with four English language teachers to know their insights on the challenges and opportunities in teaching writing online; however, the data from this preliminary interview were not considered in the study. Likewise, before data collection, the research protocol was approved by the university where most of the researchers were affiliated[1]. The researchers sent email and/or Facebook (FB) message to the target participants for their voluntary participation. The said email or FB message conveyed the purpose of the study, and ethical agreements were established with the participants (i.e., consent, right to withdraw, anonymity, and further participation in the follow-up email interview). Since the study was conducted during the

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"[1]" Research Ethics Committee, Philippine Normal University, Manila, the Philippines; Approval number: 07012021-153

pandemic, each interview, which was scheduled at a mutually convenient time, was done online via Google Meet.

A total of 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each semi-structured online interview in English was composed of open-ended guide questions and elicited answers on the following facets: challenges faced by the ELT teacher-participants in teaching writing online during the pandemic, their coping strategies in dealing with these challenges, and the opportunities of online writing instruction they valued. A short questionnaire was also used to gather information about each participant's profile. During the interviews, the researchers observed reflexivity in displaying their positionality, keeping in mind that their relationship dynamics may affect the participants' responses and guaranteeing that each interview was done objectively. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; and with the permission from the participants, each online interview was recorded. To validate the online interview data, follow-up email interviews were undertaken, which lasted for three weeks. A few of the participants' responses during the online interview were conveyed in Filipino, thus were translated into English by the researchers ensuring that they were kept as close as possible to the original expressions of the participants.

The consolidated interview transcriptions, from both online and follow-up email, were sent back to the participants for correction, addition, and approval. Afterwards, the interview data were carefully transcribed and repeatedly read and examined; subsequently, the responses, through a thematic-analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), were condensed and categorised based on the research questions posed for the study. Keyword analysis was manually done to identify the themes. Qualitative responses from the interviews were analysed in six stages: (1) "familiarization with data"; (2) "a thorough and systematic coding of the data"; (3) "theme development"; (4) "review of themes"; (5) "process of writing theme definitions"; and (6) "write up" (Clarke & Braun, 2014, pp. 1951-1952). To preserve anonymity, the qualitative responses were identified by codes for the participants, e.g., T1, T2, T3, which correspond to teachers 1 to 3, respectively.

Findings and Discussion

This section is organised around the posed research questions. The researchers believe that the unexpected and 'forced' transition from classroom to remote teaching has entailed challenges and constraints, but also coping strategies and opportunities in teaching writing online that need to be examined.

Challenges in Teaching Writing Online During the Pandemic

The interview responses revealed three specific viewpoints concerning challenges in teaching writing online during the pandemic: (1) technological concerns and equity issues, (2) vague response of schools to emergency remote teaching, and (3) problems in assessment.

Technological Concerns and Equity Issues

One of the serious concerns in teaching writing online the teacher-participants reported involves technical concerns such as internet access and bandwidth issues, which caused interruptions in conducting their online classes, a similar finding indicated by university English language teachers in Tarrayo et al.'s (2021) study. When asked about the challenges in teaching writing online, T12 immediately mentioned her concern regarding internet connection:

Okay, first umm connection, I mean, internet connection. Because sometimes, it's so frustrating when you are well-prepared and then during the actual teaching, some of the students do not have stable internet connection, so they're not able to attend the class.

This problem regarding internet access was reiterated by T13, stating that: "they [students] have this poor connectivity; they could not, they don't have access to Internet." The same challenge concerning varying access to technology and material resources was documented in Ugalingan's (2021) study, which explored online teaching experiences among preservice ESL teachers in the Philippines during the pandemic. Embedded in this problem is a bigger concern, that is, equity issues. In effect, since students have inequitable access to online learning resources such as (stable) internet connection, devices, and internet data or allowance, teachers may find it difficult to adjust course requirements and activities to accommodate such needs. These equity issues have been identified as a strong concern among teachers in Cutri et al.'s (2020) study; in fact, one teacher expressed frustration about not knowing how to identify students' socioeconomic status that could serve as basis for determining their equitable access to internet data, devices, and the like. This predicament on technological and equity issues may entail systemic, sustainable, and empathetic change where educational leaders can explore the humanistic aspect of the change process, which covers support and resources, financial and otherwise, needed by both students and teachers in online learning. School administrators may need to assess the existing, needed, and potential resources to support this change process.

Within the context of teacher education, the above findings may entail the need to provide support to preservice and in-service teachers to be more agile and adaptive to sudden events (e.g., crisis moments such as a pandemic), and be more creative when responding to certain issues as regards digital inequity in online learning. Teachers may consider the reality that while access to technology is somewhat universal today, utilizing the similar technologies for learning is not always equitable; thus, they may need to demonstrate flexibility in dealing with digital equity in the online classroom. For instance, teachers may need to be oriented on the need to recognise their learners' technological capabilities, constraints, and concerns. This can be done by administering a survey at the start of the semester to obtain a baseline understanding of students' access (or the lack thereof) to technical resources. Another way to bring digital equity in online classes is to (re)consider homework or assignment policies. Giving at least a week between assigning online homework and submitting it allows more flexibility.

Given these issues, fostering an inclusive online-learning space has become more positively compelling where teachers consider the diverse needs of learners, e.g., access needs for technologies for online learning, financial constraints. Although this presents a challenging scenario, it highlights the importance of teachers' affectivity and empathy in dealing with individual learners. Along this line of reasoning regarding online teaching, De Paepe et al. (2019) underscores the need for a "customized, student-centred, and needs-oriented learning" (p. 288). For teacher education, this may signal a need to support preservice and in-service teachers

to rethink how they deal with online learning and consider the impediments students may encounter when they access technology for learning.

Vague Response of Schools to Emergency Remote Teaching

Because of the abrupt move to online instruction caused by the pandemic, most academic institutions' response to emergency remote teaching has been vague and hardly systematic. Although school administrators have initiated ways to mitigate problems with the sudden shift to online teaching, inevitable yet solvable circumstances still have surfaced. Such consequences even presented more issues in teaching writing among the teacher-participants. One teacher shared that her school does not have a Learning Management System (LMS), which posed difficulty in his teaching:

> *We don't have LMS ... yung institutional na LMS, wala kaming available ...*
> *(We don't have LMS ... that institutional LMS is not available ...) [T10]*

T12, in addition, reported his lack of training in using online tools for teaching writing: "… we don't have enough training. I don't have enough training on other available online apps." The same concern has been revealed in Somera's (2018) study, which described educators' limited skills and knowledge to effectively implement strategies necessary for technology integration. Such sentiments may be expected since school administrators, during the pandemic, may have asked their faculty members to calibrate and develop online versions of their courses without necessarily assessing their readiness. As a result, most teachers expressed that they were hardly prepared to teach writing online. In relation to this, one participant honestly shared one of her frustrations:

> *I felt a certain insecurity at some parts I have not felt during the pre-pandemic*
> *when it comes to writing classes. For one, I get, I got frustrated for some time,*
> *having to squeeze in a lot of the tasks that can fit in the schedule ... [T11]*

These challenges, on the other hand, serve as crucial factors for developing and implementing online teaching, which include preparing teachers to acquire and/or enrich their technology-integration skills, and providing adequate support and training (De Paepe et al., 2019). To achieve quality instruction for learners, the focus should be both on technical and pedagogical training (i.e., sound and theoretically informed techno-pedagogy), which is not a matter of knowing how to work the buttons and setting up the system, but 'how to teach writing online.' This can be achieved through school administrators' sympathetic and realistic plans. If such plans come to fruition, teachers may become more motivated and confident in online instruction, which may, in turn, ignite interest and inspire confidence among students (Loo, 2020).

Moreover, while the abovementioned challenge may not appear fixable with the scope of teacher education, it may imply significant experiences and lessons that can inform teacher education in the future. Teacher education institutions (TEIs) may now calibrate their curricula to incorporate relevant courses that focus on addressing the unique demands which online teaching and learning pose. For example, a course on materials development can put emphasis on writing modules and preparing online course packages, which have been proved effective in some contexts as alternatives to face-to-face teaching and learning. Also, teacher education may consider rethinking ways on how education systems can strengthen engagement between schools and parents, so parents can be informed and guided on how to support their children during online learning. At the same time, teacher education may give more support to teacher training

about the strategic use of various helpful digital resources (e.g., social media such as Facebook and YouTube) for pedagogical practice apart from LMSs, which may not be available in certain learning establishments.

Problems in Assessment

Based on the interview responses, most teachers encountered difficulty in giving feedback. T2 expressed his sentiment as regards inadequacy of time to provide feedback to students' written outputs: "… I was challenged because the time is shorter, so I don't have enough time to give them enough feedback." While online platforms and social media, such as Facebook Messenger, may be employed for providing feedback to students' works, the teachers, however, disclosed the difficulty they faced in navigating such tools to achieve this purpose. T13 shared: "… it's really also difficult to give your feedback if it's done online or through Messenger. It's really difficult." Such a challenge implies that the teachers need to be flexible since it appears that giving feedback should not be done in a uniform way for specific reasons. For example, some students work well asynchronously, while some are comfortable listening to feedback via video-conferencing or audio call; others need more interaction. Teachers can also explore new, innovative ways to give feedback for academic writing such as screencasting, a new method of giving feedback where the computer screen is video-captured while an audio-recording is being made; in this setup, students receive oral feedback in connection with written corrective feedback. Bush's (2020) study revealed students' positive orientation towards screencasting; they appreciated the increased rapport with the teacher as a result of screencast feedback, a similar finding reported in Silva's (2017) investigation. These challenges in giving feedback entail that writing teachers may need to be more patient, creative, and adaptive, providing themselves and their students enough space and time to adjust and explore. Also, these identified challenges bear significance to teacher education. In future situations where online learning may be the norm, preservice and in-service teachers may need to be prepared to employ a variety of delivery systems for feedback (e.g., one-on-one and conference calls, video-conferencing, screencasting), especially if the technological system (e.g., LMS) fails.

Another pressing issue disclosed by the participants is their fear of academic dishonesty among students, which was also revealed in Ulla et al.'s (2021) study. The teachers expressed concerns about their doubts regarding the originality of students' outputs, and cases of cheating, as revealed in the following extracts:

> *Teaching writing online is really challenging because you always have this doubt whether the outputs are really written by the students or not. So you always have to find ways to validate whether it's an authentic writing of the individual students or not. [T6]*
>
> *Um, of course, very challenging siya kasi una talagang iniisip ko 'yung issue ng plagiarism.*
> *(Um, of course, it's very challenging because I first think of the issue of plagiarism.) [T3]*

To address the problem of plagiarism, T1 ensured that all her students were aware that she was using Turnitin to check the originality of the latter's submissions: "… it's [assessment] difficult because uh, the copy-pasting is there. It's very easy for them [students] to copy-paste so what I do is, I always turn on my Turnitin and I make them aware of that …" However, some

teachers claimed that when handling large writing classes (e.g., 30-40 students in a class), plagiarism checking takes much time and may be effortful and arduous.

Another major challenge the teachers needed to contend with is the 'forced' flexibility in dealing with students request to extend submission deadlines. While specific adjustments to streamline lessons and reduce course topics to focus on the most essential learning competencies, along with guidelines from the school administration to be compassionate in dealing with students' concerns in online learning, have been undertaken, some students would tend to submit late works. T7 vehemently expressed:

> *... since our school committed itself to provide leniency to students ... probably 90% of the time, [students] submit at the latter part of the semester ... If I have like six classes of writing courses, and then I would have 40 students each class, there'll be roughly around 240 student papers to be checked. So if they wouldn't be submitting on time, that, to me, is the challenge. We really cannot force our students to submit on time because the mandate, with the memos, is to really understand the situation, the condition …*

The aforementioned problems in assessment would equate to quandaries and questions regarding how to "identify which factors are within the students' control and therefore they should be held accountable for their engagement and performance in class" and which ones are beyond their control (Cutri et. al, 2020, p. 537). Also, teachers may need to determine how they can guarantee that students hold accountability for their actual and meaningful learning. In responding to these conditions, preservice and in-service teachers may need to consider creating a sense of belonging in the virtual classroom, so students may feel they are a part of a learning community. It is important that when giving the learners a specific assessment task, they must realise why the task is there and what their learning goals are (not merely as 'learning outcomes')—something that relate to their personal and professional development. Rebuilding one's pedagogy is key here; the focus should be on building student engagement and learning— moving in a positive direction.

Coping Strategies to Address the Challenges of Teaching Writing Online

A majority of the participants described the following coping strategies in addressing the challenges of teaching writing online amid the pandemic: (1) flexibility in communicating with students and in accommodating their concerns, (2) initiatives for professional development, and (3) gaining support from colleagues and students.

Flexibility in Communicating with Students and in Accommodating Their Concerns

Safe distancing may have left students feeling isolated with the loss of connection with their classmates and teachers. Given this situation, online-class relationships play a huge part of students' learning. Most teacher-participants would utilise varied ways to connect with their students and communicate with them concerns about their writing tasks or outputs and class performance. For example, apart from using the LMS, they use social media such as Facebook Messenger to send group or individual messages to the class. Sometimes, they entertain enquiries from students as much as they could, even beyond the consultation period, which was likewise

revealed in Tarrayo et al.'s (2021) study. The following interview responses exemplify these points:

> So aside from LMS, I use other platforms like emails, Messenger, and then I also utilize group chats. [T12]
>
> … when a student fails to attend synchronous classes or two succeeding meetings, we will need to call the attention of the student and say and ask what is happening, what may seem to be the problem and would try to offer remedials and/or additional lessons if needed. [T7]
>
> I think, one thing I realized as a teacher, you need to always be present for group chat; you need always to follow up every day … you need to do that for them to be motivated … [T13]

This coping strategy employed by the teachers points to the importance of social presence in online teaching and learning (Carrillo & Flores, 2020). This social presence, which is a way to humanise language teaching, manifests empathy and concern that may help increase students' motivation to learn, as indicated in T7's and T13's responses. When teachers establish social presence in online learning, they encourage consistent participation, prompt communication, and commitment to perform learning tasks (Vinagre, 2017), which can promote a cohesive learning community built on gained trust and confidence among learners and teachers.

Initiatives for Professional Development

One interesting finding from the data analysis is the participants' tendency to consider the experience of transitioning their writing classes online as a 'creative challenge.' As such, to cope with the challenges of the sudden shift to teach writing online, they were willing to try new things to equip themselves with knowledge and skills for effective online teaching by participating in webinars and exploring varied online platforms and materials (see the extracts from T10 and T5).

> … trial and error … Most of the time, you have to devote on self-tutoring.. On your own, you have to look for references or available online materials, and learn on your own as well. [T10]
>
> I've been a fan of several webinars, so parang marami akong sinusundan na webinar. Tuwing may free webinar, oh sige, register tayo dyan, free naman … (I've been a fan of several webinars, so I've been following several webinars. If there's a free webinar, I register; anyway, it is free…) [T5]

As implied in the above extracts, the teachers acknowledged that addressing the challenges of the rapid shift to teaching writing online was not easy. However, the idea of taking the initiative to explore new things reflects the sort of hope that their efforts to meet such challenges during a crisis may result in effective online teaching. Such combined affective dimensions of willingness and hope showcases the participants' sense of optimism (Cutri et al., 2020). Likewise, through their initiative and creativity, they seemed to manage their curricular and pedagogical goals by demonstrating their agentive power to explore, adjust, and contextualise their teaching practices in a flexible manner (Li & Harfitt, 2017).

Gaining Support from Colleagues and Students

One key feature of the social affordances of online learning is collaboration (Theelen et al., 2020) where gaining support from colleagues and students is vital. T11 and T12 echoed the importance of empathy and cooperation as affective factors necessary for teaching writing online:

> *… it will always be fruitful, if we [teachers] get to share what we and what the others experience, and we can expect to experience in the future … [T11]*
> *… we [teachers] gather together and talk about our experiences in online teaching for me to be able to also learn from the best practices, maybe from them; and then it also serves as an outlet about my frustrations … [T12]*

As gleaned from the above extracts, the desire to commiserate and find empathy from colleagues concerning their teaching experiences may result in opportunities for collaboration and may serve as a way to alleviate worries related to transitioning writing courses online (Cutri & Whiting, 2018). While teaching online may position some teachers as vulnerable, such a situation serves as a way for these teachers to have empathy for their students, who may be more vulnerable. In a positive light, this vulnerability may inculcate the values of empathy and sharing (i.e., power and experiences) among teachers and learners, making the students feel they are 'partners' in learning. For instance, if a teacher runs into a technical difficulty in online teaching and does not know how to fix it, students tend to offer some assistance to address such a problem, as indicated in this view shared by T1:

> *I was willing to learn so I navigated, I explored, I asked questions from those who know, and I even asked questions from my students. I asked them, "how do we do this, how do we share?" "Ma'am you do this, you do that," and then I followed their instructions. I did not pretend to know everything. I was humble enough to admit there are limitations, but I also showed my students that I was willing to learn. I was also projecting to them the kind of attitude we should have in teaching. That we are not the be-all and end-all of knowledge; there are things we don't know, and there are things that we need to learn … I was trying to demonstrate to them what lifelong learning is, someone who is always willing to learn, and relearn, and redo things …*

This sense of humility and vulnerability, as gleaned from the above excerpt, displays a humanistic approach to language learning and teaching, allowing students and teachers to share knowledge and skills, and prompting students to be active 'partners' in the learning process. This situation likewise may prove the collaborative nature of online teaching (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020) "where all participants [teachers and students] take an active role in negotiating learning inputs" (Ugalingan et al., 2021, p. 10).

The above findings would demonstrate the teacher-participants' ability to be resilient by employing various strategies to adapt to different situations and overcome challenges posed by enforced online teaching brought by the pandemic. Resilience involves "both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways" (Ungar, 2012, p. 17). The experiences in teaching writing online amid the pandemic shared in this study can assist preservice teachers in resolving challenges in online teaching they may encounter in the future; thus, they can better prepare themselves to adapt to in-service teaching. The accounts reported in the present study may help teacher candidates "identify and practice coping strategies, emotional

competence, reframing skills, and other resilient behaviors and ways of thinking" in responding to the unique demands of online learning (Tait, 2008, p. 71).

Opportunities in Teaching Writing Online the ELT Teachers Valued

The participants were asked about the opportunities in teaching writing online they valued. Two major themes emerged: (1) optimizing the use of online-teaching platforms and resources, and (2) enhancing one's reflective practice.

Optimizing the Use of Online-teaching Platforms and Resources

The sudden shift to teaching writing online allowed the teacher-participants to rediscover their resourcefulness while addressing different learning needs and interests. This was similarly reported in Ugalingan's (2021) study, which found that Filipino preservice ESL teachers, in their online internship amid the pandemic, have developed strategies in increasing engagement in online learning by using a variety of cloud-based platforms or apps (e.g., Google Docs), which promoted collaborative learning between teachers and students. In a way, the teachers in the present study have demonstrated autonomy and their potentials for designing, enriching, and contextualizing learning materials in a more flexible and diverse manner (Li & Harfitt, 2017). They perhaps have viewed themselves as tech-savvy teachers who considered technology-integration in writing instruction as a benefit of the experience, a similar observation in Saine and West's (2017) study. The following interview extracts indicate how the teachers eagerly navigated and maximised the use of online-teaching platforms and resources:

> … I really appreciate the technology, the technological intervention in terms of teaching writing. It makes me very flexible and very creative … I'm happy about it. [T8]
> … I got to learn more on how to use the LMS because of the writing classes, you know, the dynamics of the submission portal, the submission links, etc. Sometimes, I get to discover what's the better way of submitting things … I'd be more motivated to get more creative online materials … [T11]
> I think 'yung navigating through the technology of Microsoft Word, for example when I teach, editing for creating your work, kasi you can present it, 'di ba? … Google Docs is another.
> (I think navigating through the technology of Microsoft Word, for example, when I teach, editing for creating your work, because you can present it, can't you? Google Docs is another.) [T4]

Likewise, the teachers explored the benefits of incorporating webinar-workshops in their classes where extended learning from invited experts can take place beyond the typical virtual classroom. T12 shared:

> I invite some friends [teachers] to talk about a certain topic in my class. So that's a good thing about online classes. It's because everything is online. So it would be easier for these people to be contacted. And then it's for free.

Enhancing One's Reflective Practice

When teachers aim to improve their pedagogical skills, they may need to (re)examine and make sense of their teaching insights and practices, especially with the sudden transition to teaching writing online. By doing so, they subject themselves to a professional process where they reflect upon their instructional materials and teaching strategies that facilitate English language learning (Ulla & Perales, 2021). Most participants reported that teaching writing online enhanced their reflective practice. T6 and T11, respectively, disclosed how they have become more reflective as writing teachers:

> *... in the context of teaching writing online you reflect, most of the time with regard with your teaching practices.*
> *We get to have more reflections, and we think that we need to do more, more of that ... reflecting on how compassion work this time. It's not the usual compassion that we give before, it's different.*

Based on the above excerpts, it should be noted that reflective teaching is linked to learner-centred instruction (Valdez et al., 2018), which means it provides teachers enough space to evaluate their teaching practices and make changes in them, so they can impact the learning process and assist their students in harnessing their own learning strategies.

Conclusion

The study has provided an account of the experiences of Filipino university English language teachers in teaching writing online during the pandemic. Despite the challenges they faced in the rapid transition to online instruction, they likewise gained opportunities for creative developments that may benefit their teaching practices in the long run. Addressing these concerns may be relevant in other educational contexts outside the Philippines. With remote teaching expected to continue in the future, systematic efforts should be carried out. For example, necessary support and resources may be provided by the government and academic institutions to address concerns about digital divide, which has raised equity issues, especially among students who have inequitable access to technological resources such as internet connection and devices. The study uncovered issues of digital inequality stemming from access to technology and differences in digital literacy. Also, a sustainable professional-development program may be implemented to assist teachers in enhancing their techno-pedagogical skills and knowledge, with focus on harnessing critical thinking through the aid of not-so sophisticated online tools. In this way, problems in online instruction, particularly in assessment as revealed in the study, can be mitigated. Although the issues reported in this study may not be easily addressed, especially within the scope of teacher education, these can be factored in when calibrating the teacher education curriculum in post-pandemic times (Ugalingan et al., 2021).

Based on the coping strategies shared by the teachers, humanizing language teaching in the online modality may be achieved by adapting a pedagogical approach that fundamentally relies on the social and collaborative components of learning, which can promote a sense of online community built on sharing and trust. Within this context of collaboration, technology has become a great equaliser among learners and teachers. The teacher-participants may have been 'forced' to teach online without assessing their readiness; however, they took such as an opportunity to try new things and reflect on their online-teaching practices, to humbly accept

their vulnerability, and to acknowledge the reality that online teaching requires constant upscaling and updating of one's skills and knowledge.

The limitation of the study is the small sample size. However, with this small size, robust information from the interview data have been identified, encompassing different facets and issues in teaching writing online: pedagogical, institutional, social, economic, and personal. The study has covered an interesting discussion about the importance of social presence in online instruction. Perhaps, this aspect can be further explored in future research by covering other possible 'presences' such as cognitive and teaching. Also, further studies can consider adding data-collection techniques such as focus group discussion and/or narratives to provide a richer account of online writing teachers' experiences during the pandemic.

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Conflict of Interest

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